



Orient BlackSwan

CRITICAL
THINKING IN SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY

Class, Patriarchy and Ethnicity on Sri Lankan Plantations

Two Centuries of Power and Protest



Kumari Jayawardena
Rachel Kurian

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

Class, Patriarchy and Ethnicity on Sri Lankan Plantations

Critical Thinking in South Asian History

The *Critical Thinking in South Asian History* series comprises research monographs and edited readers on the colonial and post-colonial history of South Asia. The focus is on the twentieth century and in particular on the period after 1947. The volumes in the series feature academic research on the history of specific regions in South Asia as well as historical work on transnational and interregional themes. The series will be of particular interest to those engaged in historical investigations based on disciplinary and thematic crossovers in relation to neighbouring disciplines such as sociology, social anthropology, political sociology and literary studies. It will also be useful for undergraduate and graduate students.

Series Editors

SEKHAR BANDYOPADHYAY is Professor of Asian History, Victoria University of Wellington.

WALTRAUD ERNST is Professor in the History of Medicine, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.

AMAR FAROOQUI is Professor, Department of History, University of Delhi.

BISWAMOY PATI is Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Delhi.

Class, Patriarchy and Ethnicity on Sri Lankan Plantations

Two Centuries of Power and Protest

Kumari Jayawardena
Rachel Kurian

R. Pathmanaba Iyer
27-B, High Street,
Plaistow
London E13 0AD



Orient BlackSwan

CLASS, PATRIARCHY AND ETHNICITY ON SRI LANKAN PLANTATIONS

ORIENT BLACKSWAN PRIVATE LIMITED

Registered Office

3-6-752 Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029 (Telangana), INDIA

e-mail: centraloffice@orientblackswan.com

Other Offices

Bengaluru, Bhopal, Chennai, Ernakulam,
Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kolkata,
Lucknow, Mumbai, New Delhi, Noida, Patna

© Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd. 2015

First published by Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd. 2015

ISBN 978 81 250 5878 6

Typeset in

Goudy 10/12

by Eleven Arts, Delhi

Printed in India at

Glorious Printers, Delhi

Published by

Orient Blackswan Private Limited

1/24 Asaf Ali Road

New Delhi 110 002

e-mail: delhi@orientblackswan.com

For our children
Jacob and Rian van Ooijen
and Rohan Jayawardena

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Publisher's Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	xv
Introduction	1

PART I: SLAVERY AND THE PLANTER RAJ

one	Legacies of Slavery	7
two	Influences of Slavery on Ceylon Plantations	18
three	'Our Own Form of Slavery'	35
four	'1001 Variations of Resistance'	54

PART II: OUTSIDERS CHALLENGE THE PLANTER RAJ

five	Colonial Officials Raise Concerns	69
six	Urban Professionals Protest	80
seven	The Indian Connection	91
eight	Natesa Aiyar and the First Plantation Trade Union	100
nine	Outsiders Demand Women's Rights	116
ten	The Left takes on the 'Planter Raj'	126

**PART III: FRANCHISE, NATIONAL
POLITICS AND MILITANT UNIONISM**

eleven	Controversies and Contestations over Franchise	141
twelve	Wildfire in Lipton's Tea Garden	154
thirteen	Industrial Relations	168
fourteen	Workers' Militancy in the Pre-Independence Period	184

**PART IV: POLITICS OF CITIZENSHIP
AND ETHNICITY**

fifteen	Citizenship, Statelessness and Repatriation	199
sixteen	Ethnic Tensions and Citizenship (1954-1970)	209
seventeen	'Bare Subsistence to Grinding Poverty'	223
eighteen	Political Concessions, Open Economy and Militancy	235
nineteen	A Qualitative Leap Forward	250

**PART V: DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLES
AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

twenty	Ethnic Conflict, Coalition Politics and Deepening Democracy	265
twenty-one	Social Justice and Human Development	283
twenty-two	Multiple Patriarchies and Politics	298
twenty-three	The Long March	308
	<i>Bibliography</i>	320
	<i>Index</i>	338

Preface

This book covers over two hundred years of power and protest on the plantations in Sri Lanka, focusing on the confrontations of class, patriarchy and ethnicity from the nineteenth until the twenty-first century. It is the outcome of our collaborative research and political involvement in labour and feminist movements, which resulted in academic as well as popular publications on the political economy of plantation labour, women's subordination and ethnic chauvinism. Our initial intention had been to write a history of the trade union movement on the plantations, which had begun only in the 1930s. Important questions, however, remained on how workers resisted the plantation order prior to the development of trade unionism and why it took so long for collective bargaining to be established in this sector. Another issue of importance was how national politics impacted the social, economic and political rights of these workers, under colonialism as well as after the country gained independence. It was also important to analyse the achievements of the plantation labour movement. We therefore broadened the scope of the project to include power and protest in the pre-trade union era, and the democratic struggles of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including the politics of citizenship, ethnicity and social justice.

Several findings emerged in this process. The labour regime on the plantations in Sri Lanka was influenced by slavery and feudal labour practices, such as caste hierarchies, which existed in India and Sri Lanka. The incorporation of these extra-economic forms of coercion gave rise to a harsh and comprehensive system of exploitation, and workers faced the formidable task of bringing about changes to this structure from within. While there were no formal trade unions in the nineteenth century, individuals and groups of workers exercised their agency,

resisting and defying the controls of the 'Planter Raj' in numerous ways. Under these circumstances, concerned 'outsiders' played an important role in publicising the hardships of plantation work, thereby stimulating progressive legislation and changes. Ethnic tensions that dominated national politics from the twentieth century onwards also affected the labour and democratic struggles of the plantation community, their unions and political parties. The persistent search for women's voices in plantation history also revealed the courage and commitment of several women workers and leaders, many of whom spoke out vociferously against patriarchy and fought for the rights of both women and men on the plantations.

In the writing of this book we were fortunate to have received the help of several political leaders and members of the trade unions as well as that of associated organisations, writers and activists, who were concerned with the system of economic exploitation, social oppression and political exclusion on the plantations. We record with appreciation the interviews given to us by S. Thondaman, Harry Chandrasekera, Betsy Selvaratnam and Duraisamy Mathiyugarah, all of the Ceylon Workers' Congress; A. Aziz of the Democratic Workers' Congress; S. Nadesan of the United Plantation Workers Union; Gamini Dissanayake of the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union; and Menaha Kandasamy of the Red Flag Union. We also thank Ravi Nanayakkara of the Plantation Human Development Trust, for providing us with important archival information.

We sincerely thank many writers and activists on plantation issues, including S. B. D. de Silva, Paul Caspersz, P. P. Devaraj, P. P. Manikkam, Chitrlekha Maunaguru, Lal Jayawardena, A. P. Kanapathipillai, Valli Kanapathipillai, A. Lawrence, Amali Philips, N. Shanmugaratnam, J. E. Thambiah, J. Uyangoda, M. Vamadevan and R. Yogarajah. We owe a particular debt to Charles Abeysekera, who helped us in the early draft of the manuscript. We are grateful to Richard Allen for drawing our attention to the prevalence of slavery in the Indian Ocean region, to B. Skandakumar of the Social Sciences' Association (SSA) for giving us material on slavery, K. Shanmugalingam who did research and translation on Tamil culture relevant to plantations and R. K de Silva and S. Muttiah for permission to use photographs from their books.

We are also grateful to May Yee for formatting the bibliography and to Prarthana Gama Arachchige for help in compiling it. R. Thambirajah, librarian of the International Centre of Ethnic Studies, Colombo, kindly gave us important information for the book. We would like to record our appreciation for the help provided over many years by the staff members of the Social Scientists' Association (SSA), Colombo, particularly

Preface

Rasika Chandrasekera, Dilan Godapitiya, Chandrika Widanapathirana and Andi Schubert. Thanks also to Quintus Fernando and Vidya Abhayagunawardena for their logistical support. The manuscript has benefitted from the information accessed from the Sri Lanka National Archives; Libraries of the University of Cambridge; International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague; the Social Scientists' Association, Colombo; and the archives of the *Hindu* newspaper, Chennai, Satyodaya, Kandy and the Nadesan Centre, Colombo.

Special thanks go to Nandini Rao, Mimi Choudhury and Sucharita Ray of Orient BlackSwan for their support and interest in the book, and also to the anonymous referee for perceptive comments. Thanks as well to Rajeshwari Rao for compiling the index.

Rachel Kurian and Kumari Jayawardena

Publisher's Acknowledgements

For permission to reproduce copyright material in this volume, the publisher wishes to make the following acknowledgements.

R. K. de Silva and Serendib Publications for images from *Early Prints of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)*, 1800–1900, 1985; *19th Century Newspaper Engravings of Ceylon/Sri Lanka*, 1998; and *Pictorial Impressions of Early Colonial Sri Lanka: People's Customs and Occupations*, 2014.

S. Muthiah and the Indian Heritage Foundation for images from *The Indo-Lankans: Their 200 Year Saga*, 2003.

The Women's Education and Research Centre, Colombo for permission to reproduce images.

List of Tables and Figures

TABLES

5.1	Number of Schools and Children on Estates	78
8.1	Wages in Cents in 1929	109
8.2	Minimum Wage and Reductions for Mn (in Cents) in Planting Regions	110
14.1	Trade Union Membership. 1940–47	185
17.1	Increase in Food Prices	226

FIGURES

2.1	Frances de la Poer, watercolour, <i>Picking tea, Coolhawn estate, 18 January 1896.</i>	26
3.1	Perumalammal, the first woman kangany (far right) with her family.	53
4.1	Dramatic performance by plantation workers, late 1870s.	63
8.1	Natesa Aiyar.	102
9.1	Lipton tea advertisement, 1892.	117
9.2	Meenachi Ammal.	122
14.1	From left to right, C. V. Velupillai, Abdul Aziz, S. Thondaman and K. Rajalingam, with other satyagrahis.	188

Introduction

Plantation production developed in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) in the nineteenth century under British colonialism, in an era of European history that had witnessed revolutionary movements against monarchy, aristocracy and the church along with the beginnings of liberal democracy and a laissez-faire approach to the economy.¹ It was also a period when slavery in Europe and its colonies was abolished and the ideas of the 'Enlightenment' captured the attention and imagination of the emerging local bourgeoisie. But ironically, just as slavery was abolished in the British colonies, planters in Ceylon introduced some 'slave-like' labour controls with the support of the colonial government.² It was an unusual scenario, where some members of the local colonial administration were promoting liberal political and economic reforms, while others were taking the country backwards by supporting a highly exploitative form of production.

The spread of plantations in the nineteenth century dramatically changed the agricultural landscape of the interior, dominating the economic and political development of the country in the subsequent period. From being a predominantly small-scale and subsistence peasant economy, the country became an export-oriented colony based on the large-scale production of coffee, and subsequently tea, rubber and coconut.

¹ Ceylon changed its name to Sri Lanka in 1972. In this book, we refer to the country as Ceylon prior to this date.

² While the slave trade was abolished by the early nineteenth century, emancipation or the abolition of slavery took place later in the colonies of Britain (1834–38), France (1848), the Netherlands (1863), the United States (1863), Puerto Rico (1873–76) and Cuba (1884). Brazil kept the slave trade alive longer and emancipation was fully implemented only in 1888.

The plantation sector became the state's 'most-favoured' child, with the colonial government developing roads and railways to facilitate the transport of labour, food and produce between the plantation enclaves and the ports. The planters built strong links with the colonial government, and often influenced government policy, including the enactment of fiscal, land and labour legislation in their favour. It was not surprising, therefore, that the country became known as 'Thomas Lipton's Tea Garden', reflecting his dominance in the production, retail and advertisement of Ceylon tea.³ The close links between British colonial policy and the expansion of plantations in Ceylon resulted in what was called the 'Planter Raj'—a 'domain' over which planters 'ruled' with almost complete authority and impunity. The 'realm' of the 'Planter Raj', however, went beyond the confines of individual plantations; through their pervasive influence on government policies, the planters were also able to assert their dominance in the wider polity, and were provided state patronage and protection.

Influenced by practices that had been used previously on slave plantations in the Caribbean and Latin America, the planters lived like patriarchal despots within the boundaries of their estates, often using physical force and other forms of compulsion to enforce their authority over the workers. The workers were more or less confined to the plantation, with the planters doing their best to keep the workers as a 'captive' labour force and discouraging contact with the neighbouring villages. For over a century, therefore, the plantation labour force was also effectively isolated from the urban working-class movement. The labour force formed an extremely vulnerable group, drawn from poorest and the 'lowest' castes in the Tamil-speaking districts of the Madras Presidency in neighbouring south India. These workers were amongst the most exploited sections of the working people in the island. They were incorporated into a harsh labour regime, with very low wages and little to no welfare facilities. Women workers were subjected to gender discrimination, physical violence and sexual abuse, practices reminiscent of slave plantations, but which continued to resonate with the prevailing ideologies on women's subordination in British, Indian and Ceylonese societies.

³ Sir Thomas Lipton (1848–1931), worked as a young man in his parents' small grocery shop in Glasgow, Scotland. Using innovative advertising techniques, Lipton developed a chain of shops all over Britain, specialising in cheap groceries, including tea for the working class. Lipton visited Ceylon in the 1890s and bought several tea estates, thereby expanding his tea retail sales. He became a millionaire and moved in elite circles, also receiving a knighthood in 1898 for philanthropy.

In challenging all these oppressive structures and practices, workers resorted to individual and collective forms of resistance. But it took over a hundred years before the inception of trade unions on the plantations. Once established, however, they undertook militant strikes and allied with other trade unions and radical Left groups, thereby challenging not only the 'Planter Raj', but also the 'British Raj'. The threat to capitalism and colonialism forced the government to introduce industrial relations systems to deal with labour unrest in the country. The influence of the plantation worker vote in the pre-Independence elections was also significant; it brought several plantation representatives and other Left members into parliament. This increased political strength of the plantation workers was viewed by the local bourgeoisie as a threat to their power in parliament, resulting in Citizenship Acts after Independence, which not only denied citizenship but also disfranchised the vast majority of the plantation workers.

As a result, the issue of citizenship dominated the demands of both plantation unions and political parties representing the workers. Unions moved beyond the traditional collective bargaining negotiations in order to deal with the problems of statelessness, citizenship and franchise. They strategically allied with other trade unions, political parties, civil society organisations and social movements to counter the plantation community's exploitation and claim their rights as workers and citizens. In this process, they had to confront not only the power of the planters and the state, but also the ethnic discrimination they faced in the country. Ethnicity assumed importance in this process, both as a source of violence but also as a focus for a new regionally based group identity. All these issues intertwined in national politics, with increasing recognition amongst the workers of their power as a numerically significant community, which could, if necessary, exert its strength effectively to make substantial economic and political gains. Yet the pervasive nature of patriarchy on the plantations meant that most women continued to experience gender discrimination, which was structurally entrenched in the labour regime, trade unions, ethnic and religious practices, as well as in political parties. These confrontations assumed different forms and intensities, as they responded to the wider political economy of labour and development.

Seven distinct, yet overlapping themes are examined in this book. The first deals with the legacy of slavery and the institutionalisation of economic and extra-economic forms of coercion in the labour regime and social hierarchies on Ceylonese plantations. The second is the significance of outsiders, namely bureaucrats, political leaders, women activists and civil society organisations, who influenced progressive legislation on the

plantations. The third theme of the book is labour resistance, including individual acts of defiance as well as collective mobilisation in the labour movement through trade unionism on the plantations. The fourth is the struggle for democratic rights of franchise and citizenship under British rule as well as after Independence. The fifth is ethnicity, dealing with the ways in which conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the Tamils in the north and east of the country affected the plantation workers, contributing, at the same time, to the strengthening of their own ethnic identity. The sixth is patriarchy, which is relevant to all the earlier themes mentioned, influencing not only the labour regime but also the economic, social and political struggles of the workers, particularly female workers. The seventh theme deals with the achievements of the plantation community in terms of social justice and human development.

This book explores these issues through analysing the modalities and the interactions of power and protest on the Sri Lankan plantations, focusing on how class, patriarchy and ethnicity mediated and influenced individual and collective forms of resistance and plantation politics for over two centuries.

PART one

Slavery and the Planter Raj

The plantation is ... 'an instrument of force, wielded to create and to maintain a class structure of workers and owners, connected hierarchically by a staff line of overseers and managers'.

(Eric Wolf, *Pathways of Power* 2001: 217).

Plantation production in the world began in the fifteenth century and was closely associated with colonialism and the use of slavery for the large-scale cultivation of sugar. The Portuguese were the first colonial power to experiment with the large-scale cultivation of sugar production in the island of São Tomé in the Atlantic Ocean in the 1520s, using slaves bought largely from the nearby African kingdoms of Benin and Kongo (Curtin 1998: 43). In this process, the plantation as a system of production was evolved, resulting from what Schwartz (1985: 6) has referred to as the 'union of black slavery and sugarcane'. From the sixteenth century onwards, the Portuguese, Spanish, British, French and Dutch developed plantations in their colonies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The colonial powers were eager to support the development of plantations as they viewed them as an important source of finance for the exchequer (Greenfield 1969; Beckford 1983: 88–89). The historian, Eric Williams, (who later was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago), argued in his book *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) that slavery had helped finance the industrial revolution, as those who had benefitted (plantation owners, slave traders and merchants) had invested in banks and heavy industry.¹

¹ But the expansion of plantation production did not always result in the development of the local economy. George Beckford's classic book *Persistent Poverty* (1972) linked the phenomenon of underdevelopment and poverty in the Caribbean plantations to the nature and spread of plantation production in the region.

The development of industrial capitalism in eighteenth-century Britain stimulated the use of colonies as a source of cheap imports, notably of raw materials and food, which could serve to hold down the level of industrial wages and supply factories with the low-priced inputs. Plantation production in Asia expanded under these circumstances, stimulated by the 'transport revolution' which improved lines of communication and transport between the inland and the coast.² These plantation products could also be easily shipped for sale to the industrial centres in Western Europe. These different factors were important in developing 'commercial enclaves' in the peasant hinterland as manifested in the nineteenth-century Asian plantations.³

THE SLAVE MODE OF PLANTATION PRODUCTION

The Portuguese shaped the labour regime on plantations along the lines of the extended household, the main unit of social organisation in the feudal society of the period (Greenfield 1969). The Portuguese shaped the labour regime on plantations along the lines of the extended household, which was the main unit in the society of the period. The patriarch, as its head, had absolute authority over those below him, including his wife, children servants and African slaves (Greenfield 1969). It was possible within this hierarchical organisational structure to increase the number of slaves to meet the needs of large-scale cultivation, and Portuguese planters were able to develop plantations along these lines (Greenfield 1969). Philip Curtin's classic study, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex* showed that the Portuguese experiments, particularly those in the island of São Tomé, served as a 'model for the slave plantations in the Americas' (1998: 23–24).

The early slave plantations from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries used extreme forms of coercion.⁴ There was a strict hierarchical order and a division of labour in the fields and in the wider society as well, based on race, colour and gender differences (Durant 1999: 11). The coercive nature of the labour relations on the plantations has also been a major point of theorisation. Dutch ethnologist H. J. Nieboer put forward an influential theory suggesting that compulsion was required in situations of 'open resources' (where more land was available than

² Of particular importance was the development of roads and railways, which allowed planters to cultivate their crops without having to rely on peasant labour and which also facilitated the transport of food, equipment, produce and labour.

³ For the details of this argument see Kurian (1989: 7–9).

⁴ For a review of the literature on the institution of slavery in the British Caribbean see Michael Craton (1985).

labour to cultivate it). As the plantation developed in contexts of open resources, it had to rely on slavery (an extreme form of compulsion) to meet the labour requirements of production (1900: 389).

Several studies on the history of colonial plantation systems by the New World Group of Caribbean Scholars⁵ have emphasised its harsh labour regime. Some scholars such as R. T. Smith (1967) and Jay Mandle (1972) have compared a slave plantation to a 'total institution', a concept initially developed by Erving Goffman (1961) to analyse a range of establishments, such as asylums, jails, army barracks and monasteries, which imposed tight controls over their inhabitants. According to Goffman, total institutions were places of 'residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life', which encompassed and controlled all parts of the lives of their inhabitants (Goffman 1961: xiii). In their book, *Plantation Society and Race Relations*, Durant and Knottnerus suggest that those features that existed 'to an extreme level' were the 'hierarchical authoritative structure, restricted hierarchical mobility, lack of voluntariness of membership, and mortification practices' (1999: 25), including physical punishments such as whipping, branding, severe beatings, mauling of runaways by dogs, employment of traps, snares and thumbscrews and penalties such as the denial of passes, mutilation and killings (Durant et al. 1999: 23–24).

CONTINUITIES OF COERCION AND COMPULSION

But the gathering strength of the anti-slavery movement in Britain in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as the violent resistance put up by the slaves, made it clear that slave labour could not be retained for long on plantations, forcing the planters to search for alternative sources of labour. By the time slavery had been abolished in the British colonies in 1833, another system had been initiated, based on the use of contract labour under indenture, to meet the needs of plantation production. The bulk of this indentured labour came from

⁵ The New World Group of Caribbean Scholars includes Lloyd Best, George Beckford, Norman Girvan, Clive Thomas, Havelock Brewster and Owen Jefferson. Some such as Beckford (1972) have argued that plantations functioned as enclave units, and inhibited local economic development in terms of a viable domestic agriculture as well as production for a regional market.

China, Java and India.⁶ Under indenture, a worker was obliged to serve for a specified period of time, usually five years, under the same employer with the agreement on certain conditions of work, including salary, accommodation and free passage to the place of work. The emancipation of slaves in British colonies led to the more systematic recruitment of workers under indenture for the colonial plantations.

Lord John Russell, who was a British liberal (Whig) politician and was also prime minister twice in the mid-nineteenth century, championed many of the liberal causes of his time, including the abolition of slavery and the Reform Bill of 1832. He famously remarked that the shift from slavery to indentured labour on plantations in the colonies was merely a move to a 'new form of slavery'.⁷ The conditions of work and life of these workers and the functioning and abuses of the indenture system were also explicitly linked to slavery by Hugh Tinker (1974) in his seminal work *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920*. According to him, 'the world of slavery still survived; the plantation was a world apart, on its own, subject to the laws—or whims—of those in charge: the overseers and the manager or the proprietor' (Tinker 1974: 177). Such methods of control were often reinforced by the colonial state through supportive laws and penal sanctions, preventing workers from leaving, or sometimes by toleration of abuses by planters of their workers, and taking a more direct role in the recruitment of labour (Kurian 1989: 35; Behal 1985: 20). The system of indenture also existed within India: the Assam tea plantations had recruited over three million indentured workers between the 1860s and 1947, most of them 'under conditions of generational servitude both during and after the indenture period' (Behal 2014: 4).

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, indenture on plantations in Asia coexisted with the recruitment of so-called 'free' wage labour via the 'jobber,' who was the intermediary or recruiter (*kangany*, *maistry*, *sardar*) and who travelled with the workers, conducted dealings

⁶ Some 450,000 workers from India were contracted for the British West Indies between 1845 and 1914; the Dutch imported Javanese labour to work on their plantations in Surinam, 150,000 Chinese were recruited for the plantations in Cuba from 1849 to 1875 and earlier, Cuba and Puerto Rico had brought about 600,000 slaves from Africa for their plantations between 1811 and 1870 (Curtin 1998: 176).

⁷ From the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 6 May 1840. Quoted in British Anti-Slavery Society (2010). This edition was first published in 1842 in London by Haddon, Castle Street, Finsbury, as a 'collection of papers, reports and letters, published in 1842, documents the official investigation into the export of South Asians effectively as slave labour to Mauritius and British Guiana in 1837.'

on their behalf with the estate management and had extensive control over their economic and social existence. In many ways, both indenture and so called 'free labour' continued the bonded nature of labour relations that had characterised the slave plantations of an earlier period. Thus, while slavery was legally abolished, other forms of compulsion including debt bondage and penal sanctions continued to restrain the movement of workers (Kloosterboer 1960: 191). For example, Gail Omvedt (1980: 192) has argued that the formal bondage to planters under indentureship was replaced by an informal debt bondage to intermediary labour contractors, and that plantation owners even preferred this system as it provided better control over labour. While some have theorised on the 'unfree' nature of the labour relations on plantations, (Bernstein and Brass 1992; de Silva 1982),⁸ it is clear that force and compulsion were inherent to the nature of labour relations on plantations, with different methods used to tie workers to the plantations.

Such abuses were also recorded in other colonial plantations. In his book *Taming the Coolie Beast* (1989), Jan Breman highlighted the 'coolie scandals'—the harsh treatment of workers on the plantations of Sumatra's east coast during Dutch colonial rule, and suggested that 'the relationship between the planter and the coolie, which was so imbued with the use of public and private violence, represented an extreme form of the lack of freedom of colonized labour under Dutch rule' (Breman 1989: xv). According to him, 'the migrants lost all say over their labour power' in the process of travel, reception and selection (Breman 1989: 133). Willemina Kloosterboer (1960: 191) also recorded a range of forms of coercion used against plantation workers after slavery was abolished, including debt bondage, decrees against vagrancy (if unable to pay fines, vagrants were forced to work on plantations) and various kinds of penal sanctions. And while some authors such as V. Selvaratnam (1988: 1080) also contested the complete 'isolation' of plantation workers on the Malaysian plantations, suggesting the need to pay greater attention to factors outside the plantations that influenced structures within, economic and extra-economic bonds continued to be important in restricting the mobility of workers, even after the plantation no longer assumed the forms of the classic 'total institution'.

⁸ Henry Bernstein and Tom Brass have argued that the existence of such 'unfree' relations of production was, in effect, a process of 'deproletarianization', reflecting the struggles between capital and labour in production (1992: 5–8). S. B. D. de Silva has also suggested that the plantations were not essentially forms of capitalism, but that the pattern of employer-employee relations was of a semi-feudal nature (de Silva 1982: 326).

PLANTATION PATRIARCHY

The British historian and jurist, Sir Henry Maine described the patriarchal household as characterised by the 'absolutely supreme power of the eldest male with 'dominion' extending to 'life and death, as well as over his children as his slaves' (cited in Evans: 1896: 9). Patriarchal structures and ideologies uphold the privileged position of men and the subordination of women. Patriarchal norms and practices were entrenched in the slave labour regime and plantation order since the inception of plantation production. As noted previously, the earliest plantations that were developed by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century took over the features of the prevailing feudal household of the period, which was patriarchal in form and essence.

Slave women were important workers on plantations, usually in hard field labour, being also punished severely when it was deemed necessary, with a few women who served as 'house slaves', doing much of the cooking and cleaning (Patterson 1967: 67). Male authority and violence against women, according to bell hooks (2004: 3), included physical and sexual abuse with male slaves being 'socialized by white folks to believe that they should endeavour to become patriarchs.' Such violence prevailed even after the end of slavery as 'a repetition of the strategies of control white slave-masters used' (hooks 2004: 4). While all workers were subject to a harsh discipline and control, women were, in addition, exposed to the vulnerabilities of sexual and domestic violence. Women's low status and subservience in the private and public spheres were part of the hegemonic ideology that pervaded all classes in the plantation sector and in wider society.

In these different ways, 'plantation patriarchy' all over the world was characterised by an extensive and intensive system of male domination embedded in the labour controls on the plantations and sustained by planters, the state, the community and society at large. All persons in authority on the plantations (planters, overseers, recruiters, and even inspectors and other government bureaucrats) were men, reflecting what Connell (2005) has theorised as hegemonic masculinity. The latter, characterised by a 'combination of the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities' did not necessarily require physical force but could be maintained, amongst other means, through cultural consent and the production of 'exemplars of masculinity' that symbolised authority (Connell 2005: 846). Furthermore, 'plantation patriarchy' incorporated social hierarchies and gender biases stemming from colonialism, race, caste, ethnicity, religion and cultural practices into the structure of the

labour regime and in the social organisation on plantations.⁹ Women workers were usually the victims of these 'multiple and overlapping patriarchies'.¹⁰

The abolition of slavery in the British colonies did not result in the demise of plantation patriarchy as these norms and practices were carried over under indenture and 'free labour'. In her study on Fiji, Shaista Shameem showed that planters initially recruited mainly men on indenture, preferring to have 'able bodied male labourers', while a few women were requested to meet the 'cooking and sexual needs of male labourers'. Planters also realised, however, that women could provide domestic labour for the male workers and work on the fields, while being paid lower wages than men (Shameem 1998: 55). Indentured women also faced violence and brutality from the planters and their male counterparts, with increasing numbers of women jailed, fined or forced to work even after they had completed their period of indenture (Shameem 1998: 60). There were also 'countless cases of assault and battery of women' which reflected the 'general brutality of plantation life' that remained unpunished and 'did not even reach the courts' (Shameem 1998: 62). The subordination of women workers on plantations continued even under the so called free kangany system and was most clearly visible in the accepted

⁹ The concept of patriarchy has been used by feminists to analyse structures, institutions, ideologies and processes that perpetuate male domination (for example, Barret and McIntosh 1980; Beechey 1979; Bhasin 1993; Lerner 1986; Mies 1986; Walby 1990). More recent research in South Asia has highlighted the diverse ways in which patriarchy, with the support of the state apparatus, assumed importance within other axes of domination in society, undermining women's status, entitlements and rights. In the case of India for example, Uma Chakravarti has analysed the structural links between class, caste and gender in Hindu society, and showed how practices and cultural expressions controlled women and reproduced their subjugation and oppression (2003: 7)

¹⁰ The term 'multiple and overlapping patriarchies' was initially used by Kumkum Sangari in analysing the politics of religious-based personal laws and their impact on women (1995: 3287). Uma Chakravarti paid special attention to women's discrimination in the Hindu caste system. According to her 'Caste is not merely the opposition between pure and impure but at a more fundamental level it incorporates other kinds of oppositions such as domination and subordination, exploitation and oppression, based on unequal access to material resources' (ibid.: 21). On a similar note, Gail Omvedt has argued that 'Caste is a "material reality" with a "material base"; it is not only a form but a concrete material content, and it has historically shaped the very basis of Indian society and continues to have crucial economic implications even today' (1982:14 cited in Chakravarti 2003:12).

division of labour, the patterns of supervision and control and the lower pay that women received in relation to male workers.

Over time, the retention of such patriarchal practices resulted in women being systematically discriminated against in terms of opportunities and capabilities, including having access to education and health. In many ways, one could argue that women workers on plantations were victims of what Galtung (1969: 171) has referred to as 'structural violence', which is violence 'built into the structure' and reflected in 'unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances' and social injustice for certain groups. These deficits in terms of rights and entitlements were justified by 'cultural violence', which Galtung has argued provides the ideological and material basis by which direct/physical violence (such as domestic violence and sexual harassment) and structural violence were made to 'look, even feel right' (1990: 291), and by these means 'legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society' (Galtung 1990: 202). Patriarchy was therefore both powerful and sustainable as it combined 'direct, structural and cultural violence in a vicious triangle' (Galtung 1996: 40).¹¹ Plantation patriarchy was upheld and fostered by those in power as it legitimised the lower wages and entitlements of women workers, and thereby promoted the profitability of production. It continued to prevail worldwide well into the twenty-first century as it was sustained by planters, the state, the community and the wider society.

PROTESTS AND RESISTANCE

In spite of the coercive labour regime, the slaves on the plantations did not accept their situation, resisting the controls placed on them through subversive activities as well as violent protests.¹² In the slave plantations in the southern United States and the Caribbean, there were more intensive forms of challenging the controls, such as uprisings, killings and even

¹¹ In a similar manner, Pierre Bourdieu, in *Masculine Domination* (2001), highlighted the strength of 'symbolic violence' against women in society which according to him was 'a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling' (2001: 1–2).

¹² Manuel Barcia Paz (2008) describes both overt and covert forms of resistance by slaves on the coffee and sugar plantations of Cuba in the first half of the nineteenth century. He includes slaves maintaining their own cultures as a form of resistance.

suicide. Some slaves were also known to desert their plantations, feign illness or destroy equipment. As early as 1801, a slave named Toussaint l'Overture led the slave revolt in San Domingo and proclaimed an independent state of Haiti in 1804. These protests were important in highlighting the plight of the plantations workers and inspired other movements against slavery, while causing concern and anxiety amongst the colonial rulers (Jayawardena 2007b: 89–90). The Caribbean writer C. L. R. James described this slave revolt as 'one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement' (cited in Jayawardena 2007b: 89). But labour resistance assumed more than violent action. According to Michael Craton:

Defining slave resistance merely to include plots and acts of overt rebellion is unduly limiting and misleading ... it is necessary to define slave resistance to include all forms of resistance short of actual (or proposed) overt action. This proposes a whole spectrum of activities and behavior, shading from covert sabotage, through manifestations of internal rejection and anomie, to forms of dissimulated acceptance and accommodation that were, perhaps, as subversive as other forms (1977: 222).

As with the slave plantations, and in spite of serious hindrances for collective action and protests, workers on post-slavery plantations in Asia did not accept their exploitative conditions of work easily. Different types of protests were undertaken in Asian countries that had developed plantations (Daniel, Bernstein and Brass 1992).¹³ Plantation workers in colonial Indochina participated in sabotage of company property, self-mutilation (including suicide), large-scale desertion, petty theft, 'loafing', and, in a few cases, even assaults and killings of planters (Murray 1992: 57–58). Individual forms of resistance also existed under the indentured system of Indian and Chinese labour in Malaysia, and became collective and confrontational under the Indian kangany and Chinese contract systems, which again, led to mass desertions (Ramaswamy 1992: 78–105). Desertions were also increasingly resorted to by tea plantation workers in Assam who were recruited under the *arkatti* system, a form of unlicensed recruitment. In 1884, about half of the 'time-expired coolies' signed new five-year contracts (while in 1881 only about 5 per cent of such

¹³ Effective class militancy on the part of the workers was also similarly thwarted by the planters and the state through laws restricting the movement of workers (through penal contracts, for example) and by a 'politically reactionary combination of nationalism and racism' (Bernstein and Brass 1992: 18).

workers renewed their contracts for the full standard five-year period). Behal and Mohapatra also quote labour reports that recorded rioting, mobbing, assaults and unlawful assembly (1992: 142–72). In her analysis of Suriname, Rosemarijn Hoeffte (2008) viewed such acts as ‘expressions of the constant struggle between the indentured immigrants and the plantation system’:

All these forms of resistance—foot dragging, simulation of illness, arson, sabotage, desertion, feigned ignorance, gestures of contempt, and more—were used in Asia, yet they were also well-known phenomena in the history of resistance against slavery in the Caribbean as well as in the US South (Hoeffte 2008: 34).

The response of the planters, however, was usually violent and aggressive, linked to their fear being outnumbered and ‘surrounded.’ This fear was also kept alive by the intermediaries (overseers and other agents) who reported regularly to the planters on disobedience, sabotage and other problems, while at the same time trying to show themselves as indispensable. Breman described these conditions as systemic:

The tension to which the planters were daily subjected sometimes turned into an almost hysterical feeling of insecurity. In other words, the excesses that occurred were inherent in the plantation system, rather than an aberration that was limited to a few sick minds (Breman 1989: 175).

The types of protests and the forms of resistance undertaken by the workers were historically grounded and shaped by what Ann Stoler has referred to as the ‘politics of labour control’—a process by which planters and workers developed different ways and responses to counter each other’s changing strategies (1985: 10).¹⁴ Similarly, Doug Munro also emphasised the importance of chronology in understanding the patterns of resistance on Pacific plantations, criticising authors who did not ‘sufficiently take into account alternations over time to the structural conditions of plantation life and labor, the changing nature of the labor force, and the effects of these developments on worker resistance and accommodation’ (1993: 8). Violence on plantations was not a ‘one-way’ traffic but rather

¹⁴ According to Stoler, the politics of labour control was a ‘heuristic device in that the parameters and methods of control were continually responsive to the resistance mounted against these strategies, and thus tied to how exploitation was experienced by those subject to it’ (1985: 10).

a 'contested terrain' with the internal politics of plantations being also influenced by wider circumstances, including 'the constraining hand of government authority' leading to 'a watchful neverending contest' (Munro 1998: 13–14).

The Ceylon plantations were developed in the nineteenth century after slavery had been abolished in the British colonies. The planters and the state were aware of the lucrativeness of this form of production as well as the violence used on slaves and indentured labour to control all aspects of their life on plantations. What evolved on these plantations was a combination of proved methods as well as new forms of coercion signifying the changing struggles and contestations in the politics of labour control and labour resistance.

Influences of Slavery on Ceylon Plantations

While parts of Ceylon had come under the Portuguese (1505–76), and subsequently the Dutch (1576–1796), it was British who, initially, under the aegis of the British East India Company, occupied parts of the island by 1795, and colonised it, fully bringing it under one administration in 1815. British colonial rule in Ceylon began at a time when industrial capitalism was gaining ground in Western Europe, and the government in Britain was influenced by a liberal approach to development and the conviction that the removal of feudalism and the promotion of entrepreneurship and laissez-faire policies would place the colonies on a progressive and efficient pattern of growth. Based on the experience with the lucrative nature of plantation production in the British colonies in the Atlantic Ocean, the Colonial Office viewed the large-scale cultivation of commercial crops as an important option for Ceylon. If successful, plantation production could provide the necessary raw materials and cheap wage goods for the industrial development industries in Britain, while generating sufficient funds in the colony to cover the expenses of the takeover of the island and ensure its financial self-sufficiency.

Plantation production was developed, however, in the Kandyan kingdom in the centre of the island, which had, up to 1815, been ruled by a feudal Kandyan king and his chieftains. The latter, through a system of compulsory services called *rajakariya*, extracted labour obligations from the peasantry for the cultivation of agriculture and the building of public works. The Colonial Office was also directly opposed to the practice of slavery and other forms of servile and bonded labour that existed in different parts of the country. The formal ending of the slave trade in 1807 and the legal abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1833 did not remove existing practices of slavery in Ceylon. Many of these were

indigenous, while others were 'imported' into the island. It was only in the 1840s that slavery was fully banned in the country. As a result, as discussed in this chapter, planters, some officials of the colonial government, as well as the local elite, accepted the existence of slave-like conditions of work. Plantation production in Ceylon thus developed under these different pressures, and once established, dominated the economic and political development of the country in the subsequent period.

SLAVERY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND CEYLON

While slave plantations had existed since the fifteenth century in the regions surrounding the Atlantic Ocean, slave trade in the 'hundred horizons' of the Indian Ocean had a much longer history.¹ According to the labour historian Richard Allen, 'slave trading in the Indian Ocean world was of far greater antiquity than in the Atlantic world and the total number of slaves exported from sub-Saharan Africa across the Indian Ocean and Sahara probably exceeded that shipped across the Atlantic' (2010: 47). Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the colonial powers—Portuguese, Dutch, French and British—transported 'tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of slaves', not only from Africa but also from India and South East Asia across the Indian Ocean to meet the demand for chattel labour in their colonies (Allen 2010: 48). Like the slave traders in the Atlantic Ocean, they 'tapped into already existing slave trading networks' such as those that existed in Madagascar, South East Asia, Brunei and Bali (Allen 2010: 56–57). He estimated that, between 1500 and 1850, 431,000–547,000 slaves were trafficked by Europeans from Mozambique, the Swahili Coast, Madagascar, India, Ceylon, and South East Asia to destinations in the Indian Ocean basin (Allen 2010: 60).

In the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese transported African slaves from Mozambique to their establishments in India and East Asia, and from the early seventeenth century, the Dutch, under the flag of the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC) used African and Asian slaves as 'as domestic servants, artisans, and laborers' in their settlements in region, including Batavia (Indonesia), Ceylon, Malacca and Kakassar, and the Cape of Good Hope

¹ In his book, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, Sugata Bose (2006: 272) captures what he has referred to as the 'relevance and resilience of the Indian Ocean space in modern times.'

(South Africa) (Allen 2010: 54). The Dutch sourced slaves not only from the localities near their settlements but ‘the VOC also transported sizeable numbers of slaves across the length and breadth of the Mare Indicum [Indian Ocean] to meet the demand for such labourers.’ Slaves originating from Malaya and Indonesia were transported to Ceylon and South Africa, Indian slaves were shipped to South East Asia and South Africa and Ceylonese slaves were taken to the Cape of Good Hope (Allen 2010: 54–55). The British participated in the slave trade in the Indian Ocean from the early seventeenth century transporting slaves from India to other destinations (Allen 2010: 55). The French slave trade took off from the eighteenth century with the colonisation of the Ile de Bourbon (Reunion) and Ile de France (Mauritius) (Allen 2010: 56). In these different ways, slavery was a well-known phenomenon in the Indian Ocean context, and accepted as an important source of labour by the colonial powers.

Ceylon was also exposed to the slave trade and constituted ‘a major maritime trans-shipment’ base in the region (Campbell 2007: 293).² These slaves were also incorporated into the local economy through colonialism. The Portuguese, as well as the Dutch, used slave labour to develop the regions that they had conquered (Ekama 2012: 5). During Portuguese colonial rule in Ceylon (1505–1656), African slaves from Mozambique (known as *kaffirs*—a racist term that meant ‘infidel’ in Arabic) were brought to serve in the army as troops, camp followers and carriers. Their descendants who remained in the island were employed subsequently in the Dutch (1656–1796) and the British armies from 1815 onwards (Jayawardena 2010: 73). The Dutch East India Company used slaves to reconstruct Colombo, where they worked on ‘rebuilding the fortifications, loading and unloading ships in the port and felling trees—and some worked at agriculture’ (Ekama 2012: 8). The slaves were housed in a part of Colombo which came to be known (and is still known as) Slave Island. The first Dutch colonial governor Ryklof van Goens also imported slaves from south India in the late seventeenth century to improve rice cultivation in the southwest littoral areas of the island (de Silva 1981: 169). Benedicte Hjejle, writing on ‘Slavery and Agricultural Bondage in South India in the nineteenth Century’ says significant numbers of migrants who reached Ceylon between 1843 and 1873 were from south India’s slave population (Hjejle 1967). The British government, which had occupied parts of the island by 1795, and the

² Slave trade in the Indian Ocean existed from at least 2000 BC with estimates suggesting that it peaked by the mid-nineteenth century (Campbell 2007: 295).

whole of it (including the Kandyan kingdom) by 1815, was also familiar with the use of slavery in their plantations in the Caribbean.

Slavery and other forms of chattel and bonded labour were also found amongst indigenous groups in Ceylon. Slaves owned by the monasteries were used to cultivate the temple lands during the feudal period in the kingdom of Anuradhapura (de Silva 1981: 40).³ Up to the nineteenth century, slaves from the Covia, Nallava and Pallas castes were used in the district of Jaffna in 'cultivating the lands, tending the cattle and collecting produce from the trees', while the Covias were also used as domestic slaves (East India Company 1838: 594).⁴

In 1832, W. M. G. Colebrooke, a Commissioner of Inquiry in the government administration in Ceylon examined the prevalence of slavery in the island and reported that it was 'a custom for debtors to become the slaves of their creditors' in the Kandyan kingdom (cited in *Slavery and the Slave Trade in British India* 1841: 58). He noted that some were 'descendants of native Kandyans, others of slaves bought from India, others by purchase of children during famines, and others by seizing free persons in satisfaction of pecuniary claims' (cited in *Slavery and the Slave Trade* 1841: 61). According to the Report, the punishments on slaves were severe:

By the laws and customs of the country, a master has the power of punishing his slaves in any way short of maiming or death. The punishments usually inflicted are flogging, confining in stocks or irons, cutting off their hair, and, when very refractory, selling them (cited in *Slavery and the Slave Trade* 1841: 61).

In addition to slavery, there were other forms of compulsory labour in the island. Until the early nineteenth century the peasantry in the kingdom of Kandy was obliged to provide *rajakariya*, (unpaid labour) to the feudal king and the chieftains, largely for the cultivation of grain and for the

³ Slaves owned by the monasteries were used to cultivate the temple lands during the feudal period in the kingdom of Anuradhapura (de Silva 1981: 40).

⁴ East India Company, *Slave Trade (East India) Slavery in Ceylon: Copies or Abstracts of all correspondence between the directors of the East India Company and the Company's government in India since the 1st day of June 1827, on the subject of slavery in the territories under the Company's rule, Session 15 November 1837–16 August 1838*, N. P., 1838. Available at http://books.google.nl/books/about/Slave_trade_East_India_Slavery_in_Ceylon.html?id=h2APAQAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y (accessed 17 November 2014).

building of public works (vanden Driesen 1982: 5).⁵ It was not surprising, therefore, that such slave-like practices influenced the relationship between labour and those in authority².

CHALLENGING SLAVERY

By the nineteenth century, however, the anti-slavery movements in Europe had inspired the more progressive politicians in the colonial government as well as the intelligentsia in the colonies. Regulations were passed in Ceylon in 1806 to emancipate slaves and register them, but these policies were resisted and not enforced, and slavery continued to exist as recorded in the Census of 1837 (Anon. 1841: 60). Several British and local colonial administrators in Ceylon opposed slavery and not only spoke vehemently on this issue but also took action in formulating and implementing policies and laws against slavery.

Shortly after the takeover of the island from the Dutch, Robert Andrews, a British colonial official, initiated reforms that included the abolition of capitation taxes which were paid in Jaffna by the two slave castes, the *nallavas* and *pallas* (de Silva 1981: 213, footnote 7). Another important campaigner against slavery was Sir Alexander Johnston (1775–1849) who was the Chief Justice of Ceylon from 1805 to 1817. Johnston, a friend of William Wilberforce, influenced the Ceylon intelligentsia of the time on the need to abolish slavery and forms of cruel punishment and was on record for supporting the jury system. Johnston was a product of early liberalism, and was linked with some of the radical, non-conformist Christians of his time (Jayawardena 2012: 69). He was responsible for initiating the Wesleyan Mission to Ceylon in 1814, and his influence was important in organising a petition against slavery in the island in 1816. One local signatory was Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy, who had been educated in English in Colombo and who later became chief interpreter to the colonial government.⁶ There were several other local people of European descent (known in Ceylon as Burghers) who campaigned against slavery. They included Richard Morgan, who had ties with Joseph Hume, the radical British Member of Parliament, along

⁵ Of particular importance was the building of roads from Kandy to the coast, linking the plantations to the harbour where the crops could be exported (Mills 1933: 224).

⁶ His descendants, P. Ramanathan and P. Arunachalam played, as discussed in the next chapters, an important role in highlighting the problems of the plantation workers in Ceylon.

with other progressive Burghers in Ceylon who continued the struggle against slavery (Jayawardena 2012: 210, 211, 238).

There were also cases when members of the colonial administration were sympathetic to the plight of the slaves. Some officials chastised persons who treated their slaves inhumanely.⁷ The slaves also took action against their masters. In Jaffna, it was reported that in 1801, slaves 'tried to band themselves together and present a united front to their masters', and even 'made many false complaints against their masters who in turn began to harass more' (Dep 1985: 36). While reprimanding the owners and asking them to be 'more humane' the government also cautioned the slaves 'not to make false complaints' (Dep 1985: 36). At the same time, official documents of the period indicated that in 1837 there was a fear among officials that the expanding coffee estates would bring back slavery. They therefore insisted that 'the abolition of slavery is necessary, not only on general grounds, but because the cultivation of sugar and coffee has been introduced into Ceylon, and is likely to be very greatly extended' (East India Company: 1841: 62).

COLONIAL POLICY AND PLANTATION PRODUCTION

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, there was increasing pressure from London on the local government to generate finances to cover the expenses of the military operation and other costs entailed in ruling the colony. In 1805, the Governor, Frederick North argued that commercialisation of agricultural production could prove a source of such finance. The government in London, under the influence of the capitalist ethos of the period, was keen to study how best to manage the country's resources and to deal with the financial difficulties of the colony. It appointed a Commission of Inquiry, under W. M. G. Colebrooke and C. H. Cameron, a Benthamite, which was undertaken between 1831 and 1832. Influenced by the prevailing liberal philosophy and laissez-faire approach in Britain, the Commission proposed political and economic reforms that would commercialise agriculture, promote entrepreneurship and develop the colony along more capitalist lines.

⁷ In 1799, a woman in Trincomalee who threw boiling water on a girl slave was ordered by the Collector Garrow to 'lose part of her hair, be taken around the Town on an ass, should pay expenses for the cure ... be deprived of all property in the slave for barbarity' (Dep 1982: 42). In 1805, a man who bought a child from her parents for the purpose of selling her as a slave was chastised by the Collector who took the decision that such crimes would be punished by death (Dep 1985: 36).

The Commissioners were, in particular, critical about the system of *rajakariya* which they viewed as 'an intolerable and oppressive relic of feudalism' and 'an obstacle to the free movement of labour, and to the creation of a land-market'—the choice, in the words of K. M. de Silva, being 'between the 'tropical system of compulsion' and the principle of 'economic freedom' (1981: 247). But Governor Barnes was against these proposed reforms, insisting that they were 'Utopian ideas' and 'policies of Levellers'⁸ and that 'black and white people could never be amalgamated' (Jayawardena 2012: 71). A subsequent governor, Governor Sir Wilmot Horton (1831–37) was also against the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1833, suggesting that these ideas were 'crude and impractical' and would 'degrade the Governor, politically and personally so that there might be no distinction between him and any other man' (Jayawardena 2012: 85). Underlying these conservative attitudes were not just the pressures to retain class privileges in favour of the planters and the colonial government but also the use of race and colour prejudices to justify the lower status of 'natives' under colonialism.

The plantations in Ceylon commenced during this period of volatility and change. The colonial state was keen to develop profitable enterprises, and remove so-called feudal obstacles that could hinder the mobility of labour, which they considered crucial for such progress. At the same time, the planters, some government officials as well as the local elite were familiar with slave-like conditions of work, and sought to retain some of these on the plantations. One of these was the Governor Sir Edward Barnes (1824–31), who is often referred to as the pioneer of the island's planting industry.⁹ He established, among other measures an 'incentive tax regime', abolished the export duties on coffee, cotton, sugar, indigo, opium and silk plantations for twelve years and provided basic infrastructure for development of the hinterland by building roads and bridges from the

⁸ The Levellers were a radical, republican and democratic faction in England in 1645–46 during the civil wars. They argued that sovereignty should be with the House of Commons from which the King and lords were excluded. Their programme was one of reform, economic and religious freedom. It was an early movement towards democracy which influenced later reformist movements. The word leveller was used as they allegedly wanted to 'level men's estates', and the term became a word of abuse by conservatives against radicals and reformers in later years.

⁹ According to K. M. de Silva, the colonial government found that *rajakariya* was the 'cheapest and most effective means' of building roads into the interior of the country, although the people found it perhaps 'the most obnoxious feature of the British administrative system' (1981: 245).

coast to the interior using the *rajakariya* system for this purpose (Mendis 1956: xxvii). As a plantation owner, he saw the advantages of compulsory labour for the plantation industry and was against the abolition of such feudal privileges.

In the wake of these reforms there was a 'great resort of Europeans to Ceylon' and 'a large expenditure by them in the cultivation of coffee and sugar.'¹⁰ Coffee had previously been grown in the centre of the island on a small-holder basis, but its value rose with the abolishment of slavery in important coffee-growing regions Jamaica, Dominica and Guiana as well as the removal of the preferential duties for Western Indian coffee in Britain. Taking advantage of the privileges and incentives offered by the government, several entrepreneurs took up coffee production, which from 1837 was largely based on the 'West India system of cultivation' (Ferguson 1893: 64).

Up to the 1870s, in spite of price volatility in the international market, which resulted in some estates having to close down, coffee production on the whole, was successful; plantation production expanded, prices rose or, remained stable at favourable levels and the volume of exports increased quite dramatically. As profits in this sector increased, so did the volume of investment. The history of coffee plantations in Sri Lanka was to prove short; a coffee leaf fungus, *Hemileia vastatrix*, spread and by the 1880s most of the coffee had disappeared. With the fall of coffee, many of the planters were forced to give up its production and there were a great many bankruptcies.¹¹

Many of the larger estates had started experimenting with tea production alongside coffee, and those with sufficient capital shifted to this completely. Tea was to subsequently form the mainstay of plantation agriculture in the island.¹² The government was keen to promote

¹⁰ SLNA. 4/193, Anstruther to Colonial Secretary of State, 23 November 1840.

¹¹ A commentator of the period noted the following phenomenon:

Many of the plantations were deserted, the Capitalists took fright, and superintendents were thrown out of employment and set off to other countries. There was a regular migration to Northern Australia, Fiji, Borneo, the Straits, California, Florida, Burma and elsewhere. I should say that out of 1700 planters we lost at least 400 this way (Ferguson 1887: 336).

¹² James Taylor, often referred to as the 'Father of the Tea Industry,' was a Scotsman who came to Ceylon in 1852 to work on Leelecondera Estate, a coffee estate in Hewaheta. While experimentation with tea cultivation had been done earlier in the botanical gardens at Peradeniya, James Taylor is acknowledged as the first planter to undertake large-scale cultivation of tea on a plantation basis in 1867.

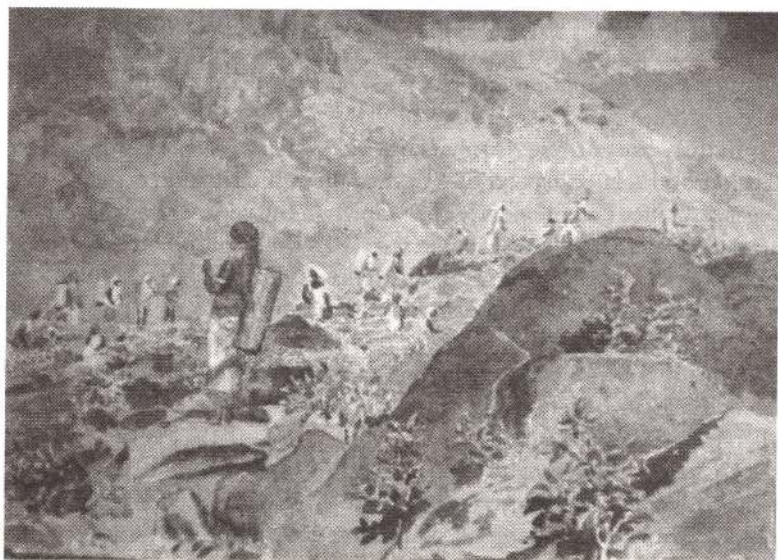


FIGURE 2.1

**Frances de la Poer, watercolour, *Picking tea*,
Coolhawn estate, 18 January 1896.**

Source: de Silva and Jayawardena (2014).

plantation production, and subsidised the industry in different ways. Most important was that the development of the tea plantations was linked to the spread of railways in the island. The railway line between Colombo and Kandy had been completed in 1867 and in 1873 it was extended further into the upcountry regions and by 1884 to Hatton and Talawakalle (for details see Wright 1907: 195f). Tea remained for a long time the single most important commercial article transported on the railways. Thus the colonial government was complicit with planters in promoting the necessary infrastructure for the plantation section. The tea industry expanded rapidly until 1896, after which its growth began to slacken in the face of competition from other areas and the reduction of demand due to the world depression (Snodgrass 1966: 35).¹³ By 1907, demand had begun to rise again and planters in Ceylon started to concentrate on the production of high-quality teas and on the opening up of markets outside Britain (Corea 1975: 62). Nevertheless, the experience of the stagnation

¹³ According to the Planters' Association of Ceylon, there were over eleven estates of over 1,000 acres producing tea in the Dimbula, Dickoya, Maskeliya, Kelani Valley, Dolosbage, Pussellawa and Matale districts in the centre of the island by 1892.

was such that it placed many of the planters in difficult circumstances; thus many changed over to rubber when the opportunity arose.¹⁴ Rubber was introduced to the country in 1876, but its production on a plantation basis was not carried out on a significant scale before the beginning of the twentieth century when it expanded in response to the increasing demands of the growing automobile industry. A major stimulus was provided by World War I when production rose by over 300 per cent between 1913 and 1919 (Kurian 1989: 83).¹⁵ Coconut, while historically a peasant crop, was also grown on a plantation basis from the 1840s, but unlike tea and even rubber, the principal investors were low country Sinhalese and to a lesser extent Ceylon Tamils, and it remained largely a small-holder crop (Roberts and Wickremeratne 1973).

CONTINUING COMPULSION AND BONDAGE

In spite of the abolition of *rajakariya*, the planters were faced with the problem of getting cheap and sufficient labour for the large-scale cultivation of coffee. L. R. Jayawardena's study on the supply of labour to the Ceylon plantations has clearly shown that the main reason for the unavailability of labour was the fact that the early coffee plantations did not, in any serious way, disturb the ties of the peasantry to the land (Jayawardena 1963).¹⁶ These estates did not encroach on the village land and dispossess groups who might then have turned to full-time wage labour on the plantations.¹⁷ Furthermore, the behaviour and the

¹⁴ PF/1373. Carruthers to Col. Sec. 18 October 1913.

¹⁵ The factories on the plantations also bought and processed the latex—the fluid obtained through 'tapping' the bark of the rubber tree—grown by smallholders. There were even coconut plantations in the country, even though it remained largely a small-holder crop.

¹⁶ While a few plantations in the early period (until 1836–37) were developed in the regions immediately surrounding the villages, thereby interfering with the *chena* cultivation, it was soon found that better 'plantation' coffee was grown on cleared forest land over 1,700 feet above sea level.

¹⁷ However, the peasants were able to convert *chena* land for 'native' coffee cultivation. According to Jayawardena (1963), British land policy between 1830 and 1930 did not create a landless Sinhalese proletariat; on the contrary, it consolidated the peasant in the village by enabling a substitution of the land extensive system of cultivation (*chena* cultivation) with land-intensive cultivation. Thus, in spite of population increase, there was no incentive to settle on the plantations as a permanent workforce.

attitude of planters, characterised by both brutality and racism, did little to persuade the peasantry to join the estate workforce. There were regular clashes over the rights of grazing, as the planters had little compunction in shooting villagers' cattle that strayed into plantation property.

Most of the peasantry were either serfs or small owners in the prevailing feudal society, and also aware of the horrors of local slavery, and would have been wary of giving up their status and working under slave-like conditions. Thus, while Sinhalese in the neighbouring areas did some work on the estates and participated in the clearing of forests, the transportation of goods and necessities, and in the construction of buildings, they could not be persuaded to work for longer periods on the estates. If employed in the field, they generally did 'piece work' as the coffee-picking period coincided with the need for labour in village agriculture (vanden Driesen 1982: 3).¹⁸ It was recognised that the 'great deficit of Ceylon' was the 'scarcity of population'¹⁹ or at least a population who could work on the plantations. By 1871, just three per cent of the resident population on the estates was Sinhalese (Meyer 1979: 460).²⁰

Labour from the south of India had been used prior to this in the building of public works and in service of the officers in the army.²¹ It was therefore not unnatural for the early planters to try and recruit workers from this region to satisfy the labour needs of large-scale cultivation of crops. As slavery had officially been abolished in the British colonies, the planters attempted to employ labour on indenture but these efforts were not successful.²² Kathleen Gough's study on Thanjavur in south India, which was an important source of labour for the coffee and tea plantations, showed that the policies of the British colonial government between 1770

¹⁸ On the participation of Sinhalese labour, see Sabonadiere (1866: 8), Forrest (1967: 4), Roberts and Wickremaratne (1973: 99) and Ameer Ali (1970: 78).

¹⁹ SLNA. 4/193. Despatch. Anstruther (?) to Col. Secy. of State, 23 November 1840 (London).

²⁰ Eric Meyer has argued that planters were interested in supplementing their Tamil workforce with Sinhalese labour. Basically, the planters 'wanted labour they could dismiss at will' (1979: 467).

²¹ SLNA. 5/2. North to Hobart, Dispatches, 3 October 1804 and 5 October 1804.

²² Governor Barnes hired some 150 indentured workers in 1828 from south India to develop his own plantation but they deserted within a year (Kumar 1965: 129). The development of coffee plantations gave rise to a more 'systematic recruitment' when in 1839, 2432 indentured workers came across to the island. Legislation was enacted allowing planters to take action against workers who deserted but as 'desertion was difficult to check when the homeland was so near', the indenture system had to be given up and was replaced by the kangany system of labour contractors.

and 1850 had resulted in a state of chronic indebtedness of all ordinary villagers to the large land owners and the city usurers. Furthermore, these regions suffered from famines and deprivation during this period, mostly affecting the lowest castes and classes in the villages. It was important for them to have other forms of remuneration. Working on the coffee plantations was one such alternative. According to Gough (1981), the systematic recruiting of labour to Ceylon from the 1830s was also facilitated by the legal freeing of slaves in India for it allowed agents to beguile or kidnap poor landless labour from the region. An important element also was that it allowed the southern Indian landlords to retain a sufficient labour force through debt bondage while it relieved them of the encumbrance of a looking after destitute peasants (Gough 1981: 119–21).

South India also had a system of 'oriental slavery' and India was exempted from the Emancipation Act of 1833, with the Indian government even employing slaves, and the institution of slavery was abolished only in 1843 under intense pressure from humanitarians in the British Parliament (Kumar 1965: 73). This particular conjuncture of circumstances and needs paved the way for labour from southern India to migrate on a seasonal basis to work on the coffee plantations in Ceylon. In effect, the workers were caught between debt bondage and starvation, and working on the Ceylon plantations, even if wages were low, was often the only survival option. In a very real sense, this plantation labour was not 'free' labour, even if it was deployed in commercial agriculture.

One key aspect of the slave and migrant trade was the transport of these workers from their country of origin. This inevitably occurred in horrifying conditions, the most notorious example being the famous 'Middle Passage' between West Africa and the New World. People were captured, forced to march to the coast, sold to slave traders and transported in chains, many dying from starvation and disease on this voyage, which in the early years took several weeks. Similarly the long trek of south Indian workers to central Ceylon was a story of untold hardship and misery. Early labour for the plantations came from the south of India—the Carnatic, the Nizam's dominions and the Coromandel coast, while later emigrations extended to the interior of India. Since coffee required mainly seasonal labour (peaking generally in November), these workers rarely remained beyond a few months and returned to their country with their earnings. In many ways, this early plantation workforce was essentially a seasonal and migrant male labour force, women constituting only 2 per cent of the arrivals and departures.

The majority of these migrants arrived by crossing the Palk Strait from the southern tip of India, near Ramnad, to Talaimanar, sailing for four to five hours. Others crossed over by Adam's Bridge (a line of low islands,

shoals and land banks forming the imperfect isthmus between India and Ceylon). Either way, they reached Mannar and then moved south along the west coast of the island, to Puttalam and then Kandy. As Emerson Tennent reported in 1847, the road from Mannar to Puttalam was 'one of the most desolate and inhospitable in the island', a distance of some 40 miles. The road from Puttalam to Kandy was about 81 miles.²³

The voyage on the whole was fraught with difficulties. According to Emerson Tennent, the workers faced problems both on their march to the estates and on the estates. He claimed that it was not uncommon for these workers to be exposed to disease and left by their companions en route to die on the road 'without the care of an attendant or even the shelter of a roof.' They often suffered from fever and dysentery and, when they were sick, they were sometimes driven off to die instead of being tended by Medical Advisors or conveyed to hospitals.²⁴ Bastiampillai has also written on the 'immense hardships' endured by the workers on the 'trek to Ceylon' could be viewed as a 'race for life and the able, sacrificed the injured or the sick or else they too faced a fatal risk' (1984: 41). The Police Magistrate of Kegalle in 1845 (when twelve workers had died on the road in June of that year) asked the police to cover the Colombo-Kandy road and safeguard passengers and give protection 'to the unfortunate Malabar sick coolies, who deserted by their comrades mostly perish miserably in considerable number' (Dep 1982: 251). Given the problems experienced in the voyage to the Ceylon plantations, workers migrated only if alternative sources of employment and livelihood were not available in India.

The spread of coffee resulted in greater demand for workers, and the Ceylon government passed Ordinance No. 15 of 1858, which had the specific purpose of 'encouraging and improving the immigration of coolies from the south of India'²⁵ and which created the Immigrant Labour Commission. This Commission was to prove very active in the second half of the nineteenth century. It sent an Agent to south India to look into the possibilities of obtaining more labour. The intention was to 'employ native agents to collect coolies to whom he will make small advances on account of private individuals who may lodge money with the Commission for that purpose, by which means he will be able in a short time to determine if this plan can be permanently adopted.'²⁶ The

²³ SLNA 3/34, Pt. I Tennent to Grey, Dispatch No. 6 (misc). 21 April 1847.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Report of the *Immigrant Labour Commission of Ceylon* for the half-year ending 30 June 1859.

²⁶ SLNA. 6/2644: Robert Dawson, Secy. of the Immigrant Labour Commission to Colonial Secretary, 11 August 1859.

use of advances and native recruiters (*kanganies*) to persuade workers to migrate as plantation to Ceylon became the main form of recruitment, which, as discussed in the subsequent section, was also associated with bondedness and indebtedness. Estimates suggest that between 1871 and 1891, 90 per cent of workers originated from the Madras Presidency (Kumar 1965: 129). When conditions for rice cultivation in India were favourable and there were possibilities for the workers to make an adequate living in India, they remained in the country but emigration also increased during periods of famine in south India as in 1877–78.

Women had also been an important part of the labour force in the slave plantations. Similarly, one important feature of this increased demand for labour and the pattern of recruitment in Ceylon was the increasing search for and involvement of female labour. The planters saw them as both a source of cheap labour and a means by which labour could be encouraged to stay for longer periods. As early as 1860, the Secretary of the Immigrant Labour Commission asked the Agent in India to look for more labour, 'either on long or short engagements, and who if required would bring their wives and families with them.'²⁷ The Agent noted that the women were generally employed for 'carrying earth from the embankments of tanks and were the more steady and regular labourers.'²⁸ He thought 'most probably a considerable number might be induced to emigrate to Ceylon with the men, if a quick passage was ensured.' He said that he had every reason to believe that when a regular line of steam communication was established between southern India and Ceylon, the immigrants would be 'induced to take their wives and families and remain for a period instead of returning after a few months work.'²⁹ More importantly, these women were also paid less than the men.³⁰ The Commission was willing to pay relatively higher rates for 'able-bodied' men, with 'women and youths at some proportionally lower rate.'³¹

Few women migrated as workers in the early period, and they constituted just 2.6 per cent of the total labour force on the plantations in 1843.³² Those women who migrated were, no doubt, forced to provide sexual services to the men. W. C. Twynam, Government Agent of Jaffna, observed during the 1840s, '...miserable gangs of coolies ... with one or two

²⁷ SLNA. 6/2144: Dawson to Graham, 6 March 1860.

²⁸ SLNA. 6/2644: Graham to Hansbrow, 24 March 1859.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ SLNA. 2/2644: Graham to Dawson, 20 September 1860.

³¹ SLNA. 2/2644: Dawson to Graham, 6 March 1869.

³² Ferguson, *Ceylon Directory*: 1866–1868, p. 183 and Appendix 2.

women to 50 or 100 men.³³ With the development of tea plantations, the increased demand for labour along with poverty and unemployment in certain pockets of the Madras Presidency, led to more women migrating for plantation work, with the proportion of the female labour (excluding child labour) increasing to 27 per cent in 1866.³⁴ From then onwards the proportion of female labour continued to increase. By 1917, there were 234,594 males and 205,708 females working on the plantations, leading in time to the equalisation in the gender composition (Majoriebanks and Marakkayar 1917: 2–3).

The pattern of labour recruitment in Ceylon, while associated with the employment of so-called 'free labour' had many similarities with both slave and indentured workers on plantations being a form of bonded labour. With the expansion of tea plantations, the planters employed more 'native' recruiters or kanganies to acquire the necessary labour. Over time this practice was known as the kangany system of recruitment. Kanganies were given advances for the voyage and other expenses and were encouraged to do what they could to supply labour for the plantations. The majority of these kanganies went to their own villages, to secure this labour from among their relatives and friends. Some kanganies also advanced money to their recruits for their transportation and other costs on the condition that this would be repaid when they received their wages. There were also situations when the kangany himself did not go to India to recruit, but remitted money obtained for this purpose to his relatives who would recruit for him and dispatch the workers. In this way, old kangany gangs increased in number and new kangany gangs came into existence (Majoriebanks and Marakkayar 1917: 2). By the 1870s, when the coffee cultivation was at its peak, a hierarchy also emerged among the kanganies, where a head kangany controlled several sub-kanganies (Wenzlhuemer 2008: 250).

Central to the recruitment for the Ceylon plantations was the system of advances given by the planters to the recruiters who, in turn, used these to persuade workers to come across and work on the plantations. The availability of such funds to labour that lived under extreme conditions of destitution and famine was crucial in the decision to undertake the hardships of the trek and accept the difficult conditions of life and work on the plantations, all of which were no doubt, well

³³ London, Colonial Office, CO 54/475, Letter to Colonial Secretary, Henry T. Irving in 'Correspondence on The Condition of Malabar Coolies in Ceylon', p. 16, Enclosure No. 8, 30 September 1869.

³⁴ Ferguson, *Ceylon Directory*: 1866–1868, p. 183 and Appendix 2.

known through the experiences of the previous migrants. According to Heidemann (1992), high advances were important in attracting workers who had previously been 'unwilling to migrate in the past' (:21 cited in Wenzlhuemer 2008: 250). According to him, some workers were sent by their families, with the latter retaining the advances or using them to pay local debts, while landlords also took the advances to redeem the workers' debts. There were also instances of abuse and kidnapping (Wenzlhuemer 2008).

The system of recruitment created an almost endemic problem of indebtedness among the workers. The very fact that advances had to be made to the workers for their voyage from south India to the plantations in Ceylon, including food, clothing and other expenses, meant that every plantation worker began his or her work life already in debt. Moreover, since this money was advanced through the kangany, the worker was 'virtually the servant of the kangany.'³⁵ The Immigrant Labour Commission, which was primarily interested in recruiting more labour, saw this indebtedness as a major factor in hindering labour mobility as early as 1859. It noted that the

Greatest evil of the system and which doubtless has had the most prejudicial effect on the supply of labour, however, is the loss which the cooly sustains in the extortion practiced by the Kanganis when making advances to him, or in being compelled to make good the advances received by other coolies who may have died on their way to their place of employment.³⁶

While these workers were not technically considered slaves, they and their families—both in India and in Ceylon—were bonded through the ties of indebtedness. Indebtedness to the kangany transferred a substantial amount of responsibility of containing and controlling the labour force from the planter to an intermediary, and was thus, in many ways a preferred option for the planters. The debt-bondage that characterised their employment on plantations meant that the workers under the kangany system were not 'free' but chattel labour similar to slaves, serving the needs of production. The kangany system was also less protective of the workers than those recruited under indenture who were subject to a degree

³⁵ SLNA. PF/24: Attorney General to Colonial Secretary, No. 364, 4 September 1897.

³⁶ Report of the Immigrant Labour Commission, Colombo, for the half-year ending 30 June 1859.

of government scrutiny and protection. Paradoxically, the relatively hidden nature of these monetary ties and transactions sustained 'unfree labour' in a context where the colonial state was intent on promoting entrepreneurship, removing feudal ties, and increasing the mobility of labour. These circumstances also increased the potential for excessive exploitation and coercion, which was to form the hallmark of the Planter Raj in Ceylon, as discussed in the subsequent chapters.

three

‘Our Own Form of Slavery’¹

The essence of the emerging labour regime (on Asian plantations) was reliance on tried means of exerting pressure in combination with resort to new forms of legal coercion.

(Jan Breman, *Labour Migration and Rural Transformation in Colonial Asia*, 1987: 69).

The planting community is all powerful and highly organised and is able to have its own way in every matter.... Every inch of ground in the Planting districts belongs to this community and every building is theirs.

(K. Natesa Aiyar, *Under Planter Raj*, undated: 23).

While the nineteenth-century plantations in Asia developed after slavery had been officially abolished in the British colonies, the colonial state was aware of the value of this ‘model’ for the large-scale cultivation of tropical crops. Through a series of subsidies and incentives, including tax benefits, availability of cheap land as well as the development of roads and railways to the interior of the island, the government was successful, as discussed in Chapter 2, in promoting the ‘West India system of cultivation’ (Ferguson 1893: 64). By the early twentieth century, tea, rubber and coconut were produced on plantations. Tea, with its demand for perennial labour assumed the more ‘classic’ plantation model with workers residing mainly within the boundaries of the estate.

PLANTATION HIERARCHIES

The plantation in Ceylon, similar to those under slavery in the Atlantic region, was a distinct unit of production with a clear geographical

¹ See P. Arunachalam, *Speeches and Writings* (Colombo: H.W. Cave & Co., 1936), p. 217.

boundary within which workers lived and worked on the cultivation of large-scale cultivation of tropical commercial crops. Like the slaves of the previous period, the workers on the Ceylon plantations migrated from elsewhere and had few links with local society. Hierarchies and status differences were instituted at all levels on the plantation and these were visible in the work, living and social arrangements, and justified and enforced through supportive ideologies as well as physical violence. Kemp (1985) has suggested that a 'planting ideology' developed on the estates, which was sufficiently powerful to compel persons and groups who came from different backgrounds to accept this institutionalisation of hierarchy.

At the peak of this pyramid of power was the British planter or superintendent, referred to in Tamil as the *periya dorai* (big master), who, like his counterpart in the slave plantations, wielded absolute authority over everything within the boundaries of the estate. Below him were his assistants, generally British as well—the *sinna dorais* (small or junior masters). The superintendent and his assistants formed the apex of the hierarchical order (although there were also differences between them) and were also spatially and socially separated from others in the estate. The planter or superintendent and his family lived in a large 'bungalow' with a spacious garden and scenic view. Depending on the needs of the household, several workers were employed in his residence on a full-time basis. The assistant planters/superintendents usually had similar facilities, although on a slightly lower scale of luxury. The planters (and their assistants) formed a closed group; they and their wives had their own whites-only clubs in the plantation region and patronised other all-white clubs in the towns.

Below the planter and his assistants were the office 'staff', mainly clerks and accountants (*kanakapillai*), who tended to be Tamils or Euro-Asians from outside the estate with an English education. While they respected the higher status accorded to the planters, they did not view themselves on the same level as the workers. On the contrary, they saw themselves as part of the management and their social life was segregated from that of both planters and the workers. The members of the staff were housed in 'quarters', usually single or twin cottages of a modest size, separate from the estate labour force. They usually even looked down on the workers. Many of the staff were English-educated Tamils from the Jaffna district, who distanced themselves socially from the workers.

The workers were at the bottom of this hierarchical order. They were allocated single rooms in barrack-like structures, similar to the quarters of many slaves and indentured workers on West Indian plantations

(Higman 1984: 220–21).² This form of housing was relatively unknown in Ceylon and was, no doubt transferred to the Asian setting by planters who were familiar with slave plantations. Workers had to share these with several others and lived in crowded and unhealthy surroundings. A planter in Ceylon in the 1880s justified these conditions by saying that the 'coolies' appeared to 'prefer smaller houses' as they were 'warm and more cosy' adding that rooms of 12 feet by 12 feet were provided for some twelve workers and that the workers had 'no objection to be packed tolerably close' (Sabonadiere 1866: 66 cited in Kurian 1989: 72). Planters were clearly more concerned about the costs of housing rather than improving the living conditions of the workers. For its own part, the colonial government also paid little attention to the welfare needs of the workers and thereby condoned this neglect on the part of the planters. As a result, and in spite of increasing numbers of workers residing on the plantations with the spread of tea, they continued to be housed in these 'line rooms' with serious problems of overcrowding and ill health.

THE PLANTERS—A 'ROUGH AND READY LOT'³

Like their counterparts in the slave plantations, the planters in Ceylon resorted to compulsion and violence to control the workers. Such practices were retained also by planters moving from the West Indies to Ceylon in the 1830s and 1840s in the wake of the emancipation of slaves and the decline of sugar in the West Indies (Tinker 1974: 177). According to Ludowyk (1966: 59), the initial period of coffee cultivation could be characterised as an 'epidemic'—'the mass infection of all potential victims (in this case the moneyed section of the community) feverish speculation, the delirium of visions of immense profits, and fits of rage that the Ceylon government or parliament was withholding the legislation which could have ensured these.' D. M. Forrest (1967: 36–37) claimed that the early planters were 'speculators in coffee land' who hired superintendents 'when and how they could', many of whom had 'no or very poor education'. They came to the island as 'adventurers, military cast-offs, tough characters

² However, reports in the early nineteenth century in the British West Indies suggest that slaves disliked this form of housing, including its lack of privacy and garden space, with one slave, Mary Prince, in the Bahamas, describing the accommodation as 'a long shed, divided into narrow slips, like the stalls used for cattle' (Higman 1984).

³ Forrest 1969: 6.

[who] got together on a Saturday night [when] the letting down of hair took a riotous character.⁴ The owners of plantations 'in their haste hired a fairly motley crew of managers to open up the land' though this changed to some extent by the 1850s, when people with more farming experience also set up plantations (Forrest 1969: 6). The behaviour of the planters also triggered criticism from the government with the Governor of Ceylon, Lord Torrington, suggesting that it was one of the causes of the peasant insurrection of 1848. In a private letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies,⁵ he called them 'the very worst class of Englishmen' who have degraded 'our character in the eyes of the natives', adding that 'the habits of the planters particularly with the women has been most objectionable and in the eyes of a Kandian a coffee planter is a term of reproach' (de Silva 1965: 98). There were also extreme cases, such as that of Paul MacBae of Springmount estate, Rattota, who was accused of murdering his Tamil mistress, Karandi, by hitting her with a rice pounder. The case was dismissed by the Court on the grounds that as she was 'given to much drinking' it made her ill and caused her death (Dep 1969: 191).

In the early days of coffee planting, the planters were bachelors who inevitably had liaisons with estate or village persons. From all accounts their lifestyle was rough with regular bouts of drinking and merrymaking. By the mid-nineteenth century, the British wives of planters came on the scene, merely changing the household into a typical Victorian 'respectable' one. The lives of the women workers in the lines hardly concerned them. One early exception was Annie Bissett, who 'kept house' for her bachelor brother on an estate in Madulsima. Forrest (1967: 112) writes that 'once often they got a midnight message that cholera had broken out in the lines ... three miles away. She did not hesitate and with a bottle of cholera mixture was "off up the road to doctor those coolies." But on another occasion she showed no sympathy to a woman "coming screaming from the lines... that her husband had beaten her." Bissett said that "she knew all about the story and was going to beat her too".'

Even a century later, when the first Ceylonese planters were appointed, their wives did not deviate from the lifestyles of their predecessors. A local planter's wife described the British planters' wives saying that they 'presided over luxurious bungalows and gardens, entertained, attended parties and lunches at home and in the club', as well as 'knitting, chatting

⁴ The journalist, John Capper, refers to the 'Dumbara boys in Degalle bungalow', who indulged in 'protracted revels', leaving behind 'a vast memorial mound of empty bottles' (Forrest 1967: 38).

⁵ SLNA. 5/34. Pt.1, No. 19 (Misc.) Torrington to Grey, 10 May 1847.

and looking at magazines.' Their children were sent away to school in the town or abroad.

The methods used by the early planters to control the workers were similar in many ways to those used by their counterparts on the slave plantations in the Atlantic. The early planters were known for their use of force and aggression in countering challenges to their authority. In the nineteenth century, P. D. Millie (1878) reported that disagreements on wages were settled by a 'cuff and a kick'. In the 1850s, a planter named George Pride from Narenghena estate is reported in the words of D. M. Forrest 'to have beaten up a coolie for nearly half an hour' and was viewed as fearful with no control over his actions (Forrest 1967: 63–64). In 1876, L. F. Pilkington, who was the superintendent of Yattawatta estate in Matale, was charged with manslaughter of a worker, Karpanan, whom he had beaten to death. He was sentenced to eighteen months in prison with hard labour by the Supreme Court at a sitting in Kandy, presided over by the Chief Justice (Moldrich 1989: 90). The *Times of Ceylon* reflected the planters' viewpoint that the sentence was too severe and that three months' imprisonment 'would have met all the requirements of the case' (Moldrich 1989: 90).⁶ Even in the early decades of the twentieth century, the *Report of the Commission to Inquire into the Conditions of Immigrant Tamil Labourers in Sabaragamuwa* 1914 noted that 'some superintendents are averse to the practice, but others have admitted that castigation was resorted to whenever the occasion demanded it.'⁷

PATRIARCHAL AND CASTE CONTROLS

The threat and the actual resort to physical violence to control the workers was supplemented by a labour regime which involved close supervision of

⁶ Such attitudes and practices continued well into the twentieth century. The diehard planters of Uva believed that using thugs to beat up the 'ringleaders' of trade unions was an answer to the Lanka Sama Samaja Party or LSSP-led militant strikes in the late 1930s and early 1940s. During the Wewessa strike in May 1940, a planter expressed the view that the only thing 'coolies understand is a good thrashing' (see Chapter 10). There were however, planters who were poets and painters, while the occasional liberal planter wrote to the newspapers on workers' conditions. In the later years, there were a few more sensitive planters such as John Still, author of *Jungle Tide*, and Kenneth Morford, who formed a scout troop for boys. In the 1940s, there was a group of moderate planters who opposed the diehard attitudes of other planters.

⁷ *Report of the Commission to Inquire into the Conditions of Immigrant Tamil Labourers in Sabaragamuwa* 1914, cited in Jayawardena 1972: 22).

the cultivation practices, and also used gender and caste-based relations of power to ensure compliance. An important feature of the labour process on the plantations was the use of 'gangs' of workers under the supervision of a kangany or sub-kangany. The latter worked on the fields as a labourer or an overseer for which he received a 'name', which entitled him to a day's pay, and he was, in addition, given 'pence money,' a sum for each worker of his 'gang' who turned up to work. It was in the interests of the kangany to increase labour output and he used his supervisory status, often emulating the abuse and violence of the planter to get the maximum work from the members of his gang.

The kanganies were mainly men and had a direct stake in controlling and closely scrutinising the work done by their gangs, as they were paid according to the numbers that turned up as well as the quality of the work. An exception to the situation, as cited by S. Muthiah (2003), was the unique case of a woman head kangany named Nagan Perumalammal of Queensbury Estate, who succeeded her husband head kangany Nagan (see Fig. 3.1). According to him, 'in an age where women were meant not even to be seen, Perumalammal's appointment as Periya Kangany by the management and her acceptance by other Kanganies was extraordinary' (Muthiah 2003: 83). She was evidently a very strong personality, 'a powerful recruiter and an able manager of labour ... also known far and wide for her piety' (Muthiah 2003: 83). She was not only head kangany from 1896 until her death in 1936, but was also responsible for building the Namanather Siththar temple on that estate and supervising its annual festivals, especially during Thai Pongal. Even 100 years after Perumalammal, nothing much had changed. Odavar Hollup (1994) also refers to finding, in his fieldwork in the second half of the twentieth century, women who were 'plucking and weeding' kanganies on Rose Hill Estate, Kandy and supervised the work of other women on the fields. In his experience, 'Four experienced women had been selected to work as Kanganis by the last British planter on the estate' (Hollup 1994: 185, fn 3). However, the practice of selecting female kanganies continued to be rare in the twentieth century.

Caste was also a means of labour control on the plantations. While the majority of the plantation workers came from 'landless and vulnerable communities' in south India, caste was 'clearly utilised as an organising principle in recruiting workers' (Balasunderam, Chandrabose and Sivapragasam 2009: 79–80). The head kangany generally ranked highest on the caste hierarchy on the plantations with the majority of the workers originating from 'lower' castes. In the early days, kangany and sub-kangany

groups were relatively homogenous in terms of caste and were even related to one another (Jayaraman 1975: 20). Caste divisions also pervaded the work arrangements. The planters divided cultivation practices, as much as possible, along sub-caste groups, each under its own patriarch, *sillara* or sub-kangany.

There was also a gender division of labour on the plantations. Women worked the whole day ('time work') and undertook labour-intensive, repetitive and time-consuming tasks, such as the plucking of tea, on the grounds that they had 'nimble fingers' and were more patient and were, therefore, 'suited' to the task. Men, on the other hand, were given 'piece work', which involved tools and machines. For example, they had to prune a specific number of tea bushes, after which they were left free, usually by midday, to go home. This resulted in men working shorter hours than women while being paid higher wages up to 1984.

The gender division of labour also reflected the importance of patriarchy as a structural aspect of control on plantations. The prevailing ideology in south India and Ceylon accorded women a lower status than men and thereby justified paying them lower wages, while endorsing male authority at all levels of society. As early as 1839, a planter's report emphasised that plucking, initially undertaken by men, had become expensive, as they could not pluck 'as cheaply as the women and children', who, moreover, were more steady workers.⁸ Further, it was expected that women would accept the authority of male supervisors as this pattern was in line with the established power relations in society. These considerations of cost and 'controllability' were important reasons for planters to actively recruit women workers.

In addition to their work on the fields, women were responsible for a wide range of household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, caring for children and other family members and fetching water and firewood.⁹ These chores were not considered as 'work' as they were unpaid but accepted as the 'natural' role of women in the accepted gender division of work in society. Within the household, men were given priority and authority as befitting the accepted norms. In effect, the combination of paid and unpaid work took up most of the day for women, leaving them little time or space for social contact or leisure. Young girls were pressured to help their mothers with the burden of these different tasks. The close

⁸ Report by Rettie of the Spring Valley Estate, reporting on the Uva Estate on 4 July 1893; Spring Valley Estate.

⁹ For details, see Kurian 1982: 59–68.

proximity of the household and the field resulted in overlapping patterns of controls in both spheres of activity.

The acceptance of male authority and female subordination was also an essential component of Hinduism, the religion of the vast majority of plantation workers. Uma Chakravarti (2003) has argued that inherent in the ideology of Hinduism was the belief that all women had the 'dharma' (duty) to aspire to *pativrata*, which was considered the highest expression of women's selfhood and was reflected in 'chastity and wifely fidelity.' According to her, this concept was a 'masterstroke of genius of the Hindu normative order' where women believed they 'gained power and respect through the codes they adopted' and where 'the iniquitous and hierarchical structure was reproduced *with the complicity of women*', masking in this process, the mechanisms involved in controlling and subordinating women (Chakravarti 2003: 74). In these ways, hegemonic masculinity, as discussed in Chapter 1, resulted in women workers being placed under male domination in social and work hierarchy and these controls being rationalised and accepted as 'natural' at all levels of the plantation hierarchy.

Caste differences as practised in Hinduism between workers were also reflected in the assignment of line rooms according to caste.¹⁰ The head kangany, who knew the background and caste of his recruits, was consulted on the allocation of quarters.¹¹ The kangany also controlled the labour force under him in other ways. As the patriarch of his workers, he intervened in all aspects of the workers' lives, including the settlement of labour and other disputes and family problems and quarrels. All these factors served to make the head kangany a wealthy, influential, patriarchal and powerful figure on the estate. The whole workforce was structured so that these different divisions enhanced what was seen as the 'family principle',¹² with workers at each level exercising rights on those below them and paying respect to those higher in the hierarchy. Such methods were said to produce the most 'satisfactory results,' as they would more easily 'settle on the estate.'¹³

¹⁰ The various 'acceptable' ways of constructing line-rooms so as not to offend the traditional prejudices of the workers are given in detail by Lewis Green (1925). Interviews with the superintendents also painted a similar picture, although they attributed it to the kangany's advice, which was generally accepted, and not to any conscious attempt on the part of the management to maintain these features.

¹¹ For details see Lewis Green (1925), Chapter 2.

¹² *Report of the Labour Commission*, Colombo: 1908.

¹³ *Ceylon Labour Commission Handbook*, Dodson Press, 1935, p. 20.

The conscious entrenchment of caste and gender-based divisions in the labour process was a powerful divisive tool, used by the planters and the kanganies to prevent workers from collectively organising against persons in authority. The planters also recognised that religion could be a means of controlling the workforce through encouraging beliefs such as karma which suggested to the workers that 'their low economic position [was] ... due to their fate' (Jayaraman 1975: 154–55).

RESTRICTIONS ON MOBILITY

While the workers on the plantations were formally viewed as 'free' labour, the planters, with the support of the government, used economic and extra-economic forms of coercion to restrict the movement of workers beyond the boundaries of the estate. The creation of what were effectively such 'total institutions' in the post-slavery period came about through ties of indebtedness, the enactment of oppressive laws, and the organisation of watchers and guards to prevent workers from leaving their employment.

As the cost of their travel from India to Sri Lanka had to be repaid, workers invariably started their life on the estates in debt. The problem of indebtedness was exacerbated by the system of payment, which was such that they received no wages until they had worked for two months. Most estates also supplied rice to the workers, the cost of which was deducted from their salaries.¹⁴ The worker was often not aware of the conditions of the contract. Writing in 1848, Emerson Tennent observed the worker was generally 'ignorant of his own rights' and that his 'disposition and habitat was to suffer in silence.'¹⁵ The method of wage payment in the early years was of paying one month's wages to the workers and one month's wages to the kangany, to be set off by him against the worker's debt, a system which increased opportunities for swindling illiterate workers. This situation was exacerbated with the worsening of the economic situation, when payments were delayed. In 1888, the Governor, Arthur Gordon noted:

The revelation that a large number of planters habitually pay their coolies only four times a year, and that they then only pay the wage for the quarter

¹⁴ The daily wages in the first two decades of plantation enterprise ranged from 4 to 9 pence for a working day of some ten to eleven hours, and it rose to about 10 pence per day in the 1860s (Jayawardena 1972: 20). This was paid once in two months.

¹⁵ James Emerson Tennent to Earl Grey, CO 54/235, No. 6, 21 April 1848.

ended three months previously, is somewhat startling, and in itself suggests the expediency of some effort being made to improve the system.¹⁶

On considering the potential impact of further withholding payment, he observed that it would only create a greater degree of indebtedness. It would then create a situation whereby

His only chance of discharging these debts is by waiting on in the service of the estate for his pay: he takes further advances which bind him to the estate yet more closely and he can hardly be deemed a free monthly servant.¹⁷

The head kangany was a key figure in perpetuating the indebtedness of the workers. He was the acknowledged and de facto leader of this labour force, supervising and transacting all the financial affairs of the estate concerning 'his coolies,' even if he was not actually paying their wages.¹⁸ He was often the sole debtor to the estate, since he was the medium through which all advances were made; in this role as lender, he worked through the medium of sub-kanganies, who in turn controlled the workers under them. The head kangany often ran the estate shop, which sold goods needed by workers at high prices and also provided loans to them of high interest rates keeping the workers indebted to him (Jayawardena 1972: 17). This system gave the head kangany a great deal of power and opportunities to enrich himself.

As the sole creditor on the estate, he borrowed money directly from the estate and lent it in turn to workers. He arranged for credit on the workers' behalf at the local bazaar, which carried interest and increased workers' ties to the recruiter. A witness at the 1908 Labour Commission

¹⁶ SLNA. Pf/12. No. 451. (Emigration) Colombo, 6 November 1888.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ In addition to his function as recognised head of his own labour force, the head kangany also supervised work in the fields. For this task, he was paid 'head money', a sum he received for each worker who reported to work. In this way, the kangany (and through him, the sub-kangany) played a crucial role in the daily turnout and in organising the daily labour force, a task for which he had, in turn, to be paid. He also received a fixed salary for other 'special duties.' This description of the kangany system and the general structure of labour on Sri Lankan plantation relies heavily on the *Report and Proceedings of the Labour Commission*, Colombo, 1908 and the *Report on Indian Labour Emigration to Ceylon and Malaya*, by N. E. Majoriebanks and A. R. Marakkayar (Madras: Government Press, 1917).

said it was probable that some kanganyies did not tell the workers what their debts were from year to year; and the Commissioners reported that 'in many instances the labourer was made the victim of more or less deliberate fraud.'¹⁹ In most cases, the worker had little idea of the amount of the debt and was frequently 'made responsible for larger sums than he has in fact received or has had expended on his behalf.'²⁰ The Agent of the Government of India commented in 1931 that the workers were 'born in debt, lived in debt and died in debt' (Jayawardena 1972: 17). He further pointed out, 'The head kangany on the estate naturally wishes to keep a hold on his labourers, and in indiscriminately lending money to them, he finds a convenient means of achieving his object.'

In 1847, the Superintendent of Police in Kandy, J. S. Colepeper, made the remarkable comment that the treatment of plantation workers was 'exceedingly arbitrary and cruel' and worse than 'Negro slavery' (Roberts 1966). Sixty years later, a planter named A. H. Thomas, in giving evidence before the Labour Commission of 1908, highlighted the slave-like conditions on plantations indicating that the 'Kangany System is slavery. He will not allow ... a cooly to leave his force ... and if the Superintendent does not interfere then that is slavery' (see Jayawardena 1972: 21).

The restrictions on labour mobility were further worsened by the terms of contract and possibilities whereby the payment could be deferred. While the recruitment of workers was nearly always for a particular estate, the ability of the worker to choose the place of work was severely restricted by legislation. The most important of these were the Master-Servant Laws of 1865 in Ceylon under which plantations workers, domestic servants, skilled workers and journeymen artificers who left their employers without a month's notice or reasonable cause, or who were disobedient or insolent could be punished with a fine or imprisonment and be ordered to return to the employer.

The workers were also constrained by the fact that they needed a discharge ticket (*tundu*) from the employer before they could leave, and before they could obtain employment on another estate. This was also a legal stipulation, and the superintendents would often refuse to issue a ticket if they did not want the worker to leave.²¹ Ironically, the position

¹⁹ Labour Commission, 1908: 226, cited in Jayawardena 1972: 7.

²⁰ *Report and Proceedings of the Labour Commission*, Colombo, 1908.

²¹ The discharge ticket had to be sent to the new employer on his request. The labourer was issued a memorandum stating that he had given notice and was free to be taken on by another employer. Reemployment of a coolie who would not produce either of these was an offence punishable by the penalties and liabilities

of the kanganies was strengthened through the use and misuse of the tundu system. They used cash advances from other planters to cover these debts, obtain the necessary tundu and move the labour force to another estate. During periods of shortage of labour, the kangany would transfer 'his workers' from plantation to plantation, enriching himself through the increased advances paid by the planters. As early as 1847, Emerson Tennent the Colonial Secretary of Ceylon, observed that kanganies could 'seduce' workers from estate to estate to the 'eventual injury of all parties.'²² The Planters Association expressed its concern with 'crimping', as the practice was called (Planters Association of Ceylon 1896: 117; 1899: 17; 1900: 2). The bolting and desertion of 'coolies' also meant that the advances provided were often lost because if civil action was brought on the kangany, he would simply disappear or if made bankrupt his gang would be 'swallowed up in the gangs of this friends and relations' and the amount advanced lost.²³

Planters who resisted these tactics used by the kangany and the workers to 'desert' the estates would often not issue tundus if there was a shortage of labour and they did not want the workers to leave the estate (Jayawardena 1972: 18). The object of these different restrictions was to prevent an 'epidemic of bolting' and it could also involve employing or rewarding Sinhalese villagers to arrest labourers found on the roads outside the estate.²⁴ The Report of the Commission appointed to 'Inquire into the Conditions of Immigrant Tamil Labourers in the Planting Districts of the Province of Sabaragamuwa' noted in 1916 that superintendents purposely delayed the issue of these tickets. At the same time, other planters were prepared to give additional money to the kangany for the services of his labour gang (Wesumperuma 1986: 109). Planters were faced with the problems of increasing 'advances' for labour.²⁵ As the incidence of bolting increased, there was growing concern about the fact that the

provided under Sections 19 and 20 of Ordinance No. 11 of 1865. Instances of refusals to issue the tickets are given by Jayawardena (1972: 18) and in the *Report of a Commission to inquire into the condition ...* (1916) where it was reported that 'superintendents have not only failed to carry out this duty but have intentionally delayed the issue of discharge tickets' (paragraph 84).

²² SLNA 3/34 Pt. I, Tennent to Grey, Despatch No. 6, (misc), 21 April 1847.

²³ SLNA PF/2693a: *Times of Ceylon*, 2 November 1907. Report of a meeting of the Planters' Association of Ceylon, held on 1 November 1907.

²⁴ *Report of a Commission* 1916, paragraph 55.

²⁵ L. Jayawardena (1960: 19) has argued that these practices resulted in a difference between the 'supply price' (as stated on the tundu) and the 'demand price' (the amount the 'rival' employer was prepared to pay for the labour).

pay advances (or the so-called indebtedness of the worker), could not be recovered. Although the law was meant to formalise a contract of service between the employer and the worker, it was noted that it was the *kanganyies* who were very much involved in this process. The Attorney General, in 1898, noted:

In a very large number of cases the *kanganyies* have availed themselves of the provisions of Section II for the purpose of recovering a civil debt by a criminal prosecution, and that often a debt which could not be recovered in a civil court owing to its being prescribed.²⁶

Such movements of labour—even if they largely benefitted the *kangany*—did challenge the extreme hold that planters had over the workers. Ironically, the very methods devised by planters to ensure reliability for labour, eventually turned against their interests. Government intervention also occurred on the issue of indebtedness. Several important laws were enacted, intended to combat the worst effects of the workers' indebtedness and the resulting hold of the *kangany* on the workers, which, by the second half of the nineteenth century had resulted in increasing antagonism by workers against *kanganyies*. In response to the problems of the estate workers, Ordinance No. VII was passed for the protection of Indian immigrants in 1897. Contracts were not allowed to exceed 600 days, wages were to be paid monthly or before the fifteenth day of the following month and the worker was not bound to work more than six days a week and six consecutive hours and nine hours in total per day. However, this did little to better the indebtedness on the estates.

In spite of these measures, it was, even in the twentieth century, in vogue on estates for wages to be paid only once in two months. The Labour Commission noted in 1908 that generally one month's pay was deducted and set off against the debts of the workers to the *kanganyies*, one month's pay being handed over to them after the deduction of rice issues. Furthermore, the debts did not cease to exist with the absconding of the person or even their death. The nature of the labour relations system was such that the *kangany* would prevail on the relatives of the absconder (or the deceased) to take on the debt due. The workers appeared to have 'a moral obligation' to discharge the debt, and the *kangany* who 'would share their view of the situation', would find his own means of recovering

²⁶ SLNA. PF/24: Attorney General to Colonial Secretary, No. 364. 4 September 1897.

the amount, either in Ceylon or in the villages of southern India (Report of the Labour Commission, 1908; *Planters' Association Year Book* 1904).

In 1901, the colonial government introduced the so-called 'Tin-Ticket' by which the colonial government issued tin tokens that could be bought by the planters and given to the kanganies to be distributed to the recruits. The token had the number and name of the estate, which enabled the holder to migrate to Ceylon and be despatched to the appropriate estate under the supervision of the government. Although the intention of the system had been to protect the labourer 'safeguard against embezzlement of advances by the kangany', it did not 'prevent the labourers being saddled with comparatively large debts' (Majoriebanks and Marakkayar 1917: 39). Another ordinance was passed in 1909, by which superintendents were to pay the worker directly on a monthly basis. In the same year, workers were made immune from arrest in civil cases. In 1911, a Planters' Labour Federation was formed and the federated estates had to keep a separate account of debts with restrictions placed on the level of indebtedness of the worker, though the rules were often disregarded. These measures, however, neither seriously hindered kanganies from using the tundu system to move workers from estate to estate, nor reduced the indebtedness of the workers (Majoriebanks and Marakkayar 1917). Finally a law was passed in 1921 abolishing the tundu system while cancelling the outstanding debts of the workers.

The problem of the workers' indebtedness and the role of the kangany in perpetuating it evoked much comment. In 1930, the Indian Agent called it 'the most distressing feature' of the estate workers' life in Ceylon (Jayawardena 1972: 333).

Thousands of Indian labourers are perpetually in debt ... their debts go on increasing in inverse proportion to [their] ability to pay them ... indebtedness becomes acute chronic and well-nigh incurable (Jayawardena 1972: 333).

In addition to these economic restrictions on mobility, it was not uncommon for physical constraints to be imposed and for watchers or guards to be stationed at convenient points to prevent the workers from leaving a particular estate and to seize those who were suspected of being absconders. In the early years of planting, constables from the local police sometimes acted as watchers on the estates and had to 'act when planters and others had differences' (Dep 1969 Vol. 2: 110.) But complaints were also forthcoming of planters' 'incivility' to the police. 'I would say to some Planters that they would find it to their interest to treat the few regular

Police in the Coffee Districts with civility', were the words of the Head of the Ceylon Police, G. W. R. Campbell, who made a complaint:

I have ordered these Police to visit each estate ... and invite the remarks of the Superintendents in a book ... I regret that in some instances the treatment of constables and the remarks ... in the book generally meant to be facetious—are as offensive and uncalled for as they are injudicious. (Dep 1969 Vol. 2: 110)

Apart from the police, the judiciary were important players in restricting the movement of workers. As the Police Magistrate of Hatton noted in 1898, the prosperity of the agricultural districts depended 'largely on the *proper control and discipline of the Labourers*' and the judiciary was encouraged to 'enforce vigorously provisions whereby the bolters would be reprimanded.'²⁷ Many of these 'bolters', however, had escaped back to India, and warrants for their arrest and extradition had to be enforced in conjunction with the Government of India. These physical restrictions drew criticism on many grounds, and the Indian government upheld the view that the local magistrate was correct in refusing to extradite these persons.²⁸

RESTRICTING EDUCATION

The planters took measures to isolate the workers from the broader labour movements and protests taking part in the rest of the country. While urban labour had begun to organise from the 1890s onwards and had resorted to strikes (printers in 1893, laundry workers in 1896, carters in 1906, railways in 1912, railways and port in 1920, a general strike in 1923, port in 1927 and tramways in 1929), the plantations in these years remained quiet, and totally unaffected even during the peak periods of urban agitation in the 1920s. Every effort was made by the planters to isolate plantation labour from urban workers, and during the general strike of 1923, the Planters' Association urged its members to prevent their workers coming to Colombo in case they became 'infected with the strikers' attitude of mind' (*Planter's Association Year Book*, 1923: 11).

The strikes by the urban workers were the direct outcome of their access to education and technical skills, which gave them the capabilities

²⁷ SLNA. PF/24. Police Magistrate, Hatton, to Colonial Secretary, No. 20, 11 March 1898 (emphasis added).

²⁸ SLNA. PF/24. Letter from H. Luson, Deputy Secy. Government of India, to Colonial Secretary, (Colombo), 7 February 1898.

to read and write, and participate in the political process. Such protests took place during a period of nationalism in which labour leaders, such as A. E. Goonesinha, were involved mobilising the workers in trade unions. Goonesinha had been influenced by the anti-colonial movements in Egypt and India and by uprisings in Ireland and had admired Lenin and his role in the 1917 October Revolution in Russia (Jayawardena 1972: Chapter 5). Under his leadership, the workers became increasingly aware of their exploitation as a working class under capitalism and colonialism.

The planters, due to their frequent visits to Colombo, and other contacts in the urban areas, fully understood the power of organised workers. They were also equally aware of their own vulnerability if the plantation workers decided to undertake joint action against the exploitation they experienced. The very structure of the plantation, where planters resided relatively isolated while surrounded by large numbers of rebellious workers, meant that any type of collective protest was a serious threat not only to the stability of the system but also to the lives of the planters themselves. Furthermore, the situation was even more potentially dangerous to the planters as the plantations were established in a single region and in the event of a conflict, there was a possibility that workers from other estates would join in the confrontation. Under these circumstances, it is understandable why planters were keen to restrict educational facilities for the workers, viewing these competences as possible ways of increasing workers' consciousness and labour mobilisation.

The early plantations did not have schools, and children were left either on their own or in the care of their elder siblings (usually girls) or with an elderly, often retired female worker. While some planters eventually did set up schools, these were usually simply places to keep children and did not focus on giving them any useful skills, as it was assumed that the children would eventually work on the estates. Even by 1904, there were just sixty schools with some 2,000 pupils. But even this rudimentary education had its impact on the children's awareness. At the turn of the century, some planters remarked that children who had been to school were more efficient workers. One planter A. L. French had noticed as early as 1904 that such children were 'more intelligent, more regular and better disciplined workers in the field'; and another planter named G. E. Osborne wrote, 'boys who have passed through school are smarter and brighter and they certainly make very useful coolies.'²⁹ It needs to

²⁹ 'Summary by Mr Scott, 16 November 1903 in Panters' Association Year Book 1904 and The Education of Immigrant Tamil Cooly Children Employed on Estates, Public Instruction Office, Colombo. SLNA. PF/1095 enclosed in Dispatch no. 354. 25 August 1904.

be emphasised that hardly any girls went to school, as they were kept at home looking after children or used as child labour to pluck tea leaves.

The role of education was important in the wave of disaffection against the kangany system and against particular kanganies. In 1908, the evidence recorded by the Labour Commission of that year indicated that some workers often had little knowledge of the amount of their indebtedness to the kangany. But with improvements in education, workers were able to calculate their indebtedness and the wages due to them. As one planter observed, 'boys who had been to school were able to keep their own accounts ... and also keep accounts for coolies who were not educated, as well as write letters for them.' Perhaps the planters' awareness that education might lead to workers challenging the authority of the management also made them careful about the type of education that was given. Educated workers also became more readily aware of any malpractices on the part of the kangany or the employer. The priority that most planters gave to restricting workers' consciousness is demonstrated by the fact that even in 1920, there were only 275 schools, with 11,000 pupils, whereas there were 68,000 children of school-going age in total on the plantations. These restrictions on education were consciously put in place to avoid the plantation workers from mobilising, as their urban counterparts had, for labour rights.

The planters' concerns about their workers were also evident in the other restrictions placed on the workers, further reinforcing their captive labour status. For almost 120 years after the creation of plantations, there was one democratic right the planters were unwilling to concede during colonialism and even ten years after Independence in 1948: namely, the right of workers' representatives or 'outsiders' to enter plantations without permission of the planter. The law governing 'criminal trespass' dating from 1885 stated in section 433 of the Penal Code:

Whoever enters ... on property in the occupation of another with intent to commit an offence, or to intimidate, insult, or annoy any person in occupation ... or having lawfully entered ... remains there to intimidate, insult or annoy ... or commit an offence, is said to commit criminal trespass.

Planters were unwilling to give way on the laws concerning criminal trespass because they feared the possibility of 'outside agitators' entering plantations and organising workers to make demands or to go on strike. The fear was compounded by the isolated locations of plantations and the outnumbering of the management by the large numbers of workers resident on estates. Even when the first collective agreement between unions and planters' organisations was made in 1940, the planters refused to negotiate the trespass laws.

Excessive consumption of alcohol was a well-known phenomenon among workers forced to labour under severe and exploitative conditions. But it was also used as a power means of controlling labour. The 'tot' or 'dop' system by which workers on the wine farms in the western Cape in South Africa were paid with alcohol rations was initially introduced under Dutch colonialism in the mid-seventeenth century as a means of 'rewarding' and controlling slaves. This practice continued even after slavery was abolished. It was, from the point of view of the farm owners, an effective means of tying the workers to the farm through their dependence on alcohol, while disposing of surplus product (London 2003: 61).

This was also true of plantation labour around the world, and Hugh Tinker (1974) in *A New System of Slavery*, refers to the 'Indian drink question' among plantation workers in the colonies, adding that 'drink was cheap and plentiful and potent', taking the worker 'into a twilight world of forgetfulness' (pp. 212–13). This forgetfulness was exactly what the planters wanted and they used the consumption of liquor as a means of controlling workers. The increase in numbers of both taverns and temples was promoted and encouraged by planters as a means of keeping the labour force diverted from challenging the oppressive regime. The planters (who had their own drinking culture) promoted the sale of liquor, leading to Governor Gregory in 1873 commenting on the 'constant recommendations ... sent by planters in favour of licenses being granted for liquor shops in their neighbourhood' (Jayawardena 2007a: 100, emphasis added). The planters preferred drinking to be in public, and the worst outcomes were drunken brawls and some absenteeism. What the planters did not want was for the workers to meet privately after their labour in fields to discuss grievances and perhaps organise against the management.

Even by the 1830s, the liquor retailers in Ceylon—mainly southern Sinhalese—had opened taverns in the plantation regions where there was a 'captive' market for liquor. It did not take long for taverns to spread to the remotest plantation areas, and where there were no taverns, the illicit trade prevailed. In 1853, a newspaper said that 'taverns multiply with amazing rapidity on all roads' (Jayawardena 2007a: 101). In 1897 it was reported that 'almost every village and set of cooly lines contain a storehouse where arrack can be obtained' (*Sessional Paper*, xxxi of 1897: 7, 101, quoted in Jayawardena 2007a: 121). As Jayawardena (2007a) has written, in Ceylon 'liquor was par excellence the 'opiate' of sections of the masses.'

The system itself ... created conditions which made the consumption of liquor one of the necessities of life. The local arrack merchants cut into

'Our Own Form of Slavery'

the amount left to the worker for subsistence, by providing the 'necessary' liquor, thereby accumulating their original capital from the coffers of the poor (Jayawardena 2007a: 103).

What is more, the estate worker, who bought arrack in small quantities—by the glass or even coconut shell—lost heavily in so doing. In 1896, the Government Agent of the Western Province, F. R. Ellis, revealed the way workers were fleeced. 'The very poorest are paying nearly double ... a man who can afford to purchase a gallon gets his arrack for Rs 4.48, while the cooly who has only money to buy a glass has to pay Rs 7.48' (Jayawardena 2007a). Moreover while Central Province workers paid almost double, those in the remote Uva Province paid treble" (*Sessional Paper*, xxxi of 1897 quoted in Jayawardena 2007a: 121).

The use of racist ideologies, arrogance and brutal methods to enforce labour discipline, practices that stemmed from the slave plantations in the Atlantic, were combined with the institutionalisation of local hierarchies based on caste, religion and patriarchy on Ceylon's plantations. The result was a highly controlled labour and life regime for the workers on the plantations who were, at the same time, restrained in their mobility through the economic and extra-economic forms of coercion. The Ceylon government was also reluctant to make radical changes in what it considered a profitable sector of the economy. In these different ways, these early plantations could be viewed as Ceylon's 'own form of slavery' (Arunachalam 1936: 217) developed and refined to create a super-exploitative system of production.



FIGURE 3.1

Perumalammal, the first woman kangany (far right) with her family.

Source: Muthiah (2003).

four | '1001 Variations of Resistance'¹

The ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups (were) ... footdragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so on.

James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 1985, page xvi.

In spite of the comprehensive and systemic nature of the forms of labour control instituted under the Planter Raj in the nineteenth century, plantation workers did not acquiesce to the authoritative structures and labour conditions on the plantations, but defied them and asserted their agency. Resistance took on many forms, but in the nineteenth century remained largely unorganised, as the planters, with the support of the state, had enforced strict trespass laws to prevent unauthorised outsiders from entering the boundaries of the estate, and had kept the workers isolated from the urban working-class movement. But they were important struggles between labour and capital that ultimately had serious repercussions for the profitability of production, and forced the state to take action to remove some of the worst forms of exploitation on the plantations.

There are many studies that have shown the potential of individual and collective acts of resistance, even by non-unionised workers, to undermine prevailing structures of authority (Chapter 1). Several authors, such as E. P. Thompson have highlighted the importance of reading 'history from below' to understand the contribution of acts of individuals to social change, indicating that 'their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties' (1963: 13).

¹ Breman 1989: 153.

I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' handloom weaver, the 'Utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been dying. Their hostility to the new industrialism may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties (Thompson 1963: 13).

Jan Breman also identified passive resistance on Asian plantations as taking on various forms 'from simulated incomprehension to tardiness, inaccurate or incomplete execution of orders, and the like' (1989: 153). In his study of peasant resistance in a Malaysian village, James Scott highlighted the political importance of 'the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups', which he viewed as forms of class struggle (1985: xvi). In considering the struggle between slaves and their masters in the New World, scholars had to go, therefore, beyond individual heroic gestures and also consider 'the constant, grinding conflict over work, food, autonomy, ritual at everyday forms of resistance' (Scott 1985). According to him, these individual heroic acts, 'reinforced by a venerable popular culture of resistance' had the potential to destroy the policies of the more powerful.

Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do multiple acts of peasant insubordination and evasion create political and economic barrier reefs of their own. It is largely in this fashion that the peasantry makes its political presence felt. And whenever, to pursue the simile, the ship of state runs aground on such reefs, attention is usually directed to the shipwreck itself and not to the vast aggregation of petty acts that made it possible. For these reasons alone, it seems important to understand this quiet and anonymous welter of peasant action (Scott 1985: xvi).

One of the main problems in analysing the ways in which plantation workers in Ceylon defied the authorities was that such acts were often not recognised or acknowledged formally as resistance. On their part, the planters were interested primarily in dividing the workforce and containing any type of unrest, and had few compunctions about using compulsion and physical violence to ensure that their authority was not undermined. In doing so, they would have viewed their workers

as 'insolent' beings 'who needed to be taught a lesson', rather than recognising that they were protesting against the forms of labour control on the plantations. The state had also a stake in not recording such everyday forms of resistance as they could reflect a lack of appropriate regulations to protect the workers. In reality, though, these issues were taken up largely in specific inquiries that were set up after it became clear that the problems had assumed alarming proportions and required possible government intervention. Individuals did highlight some of the problems.

'EVERYDAY FORMS OF RESISTANCE'

One of the most direct, and in many ways the simplest, form of resistance by plantation workers was to absent themselves from work.² Evidence from 1908 showed that the situation was particularly serious in low-country plantations, where the turnout was regularly between 60–70 per cent (*Labour Commission* 1908: 371, 439). Some planters attributed this absenteeism to indebtedness and in particular to the kanganyes. According to a planter, indebtedness had resulted in workers having 'no inducement to work' as they knew that they would be looked after even if they did not work, and that furthermore any balance in wages would be used to redeem part of the debts owed to the kangany, the usurer and the shopkeeper (*Labour Commission* 1908: 619). Such absences had serious consequences for cultivation practices and the harvesting of the plantation crops, and thereby not only undermined the authority of the planters but also affected their profits from production. It was clearly, however, an important form of resisting the established work practices, which were under the authority of the planters. In 1915, some 577 out of the 4,409 estate workers who were brought before the Police Courts were accused of neglecting or refusing to attend to work, under Section 11 of the Ordinance 11 of 1865 (Majorie banks and Marayakkar 1917).

Many forms of resistance were directly related to the labour controls placed on the workers, who resorted to various means to counter the power of the planters. Even on the coffee plantations, workers impaired machines to gain rest, went back to their line rooms after reporting for muster, stripped the green beans to make the plucking of ripe beans easier, hid in the fields or nearby jungles to take naps, and even stole coffee and

² Such practices were common in other plantation contexts and even in the slave plantations. Stephanie Camp (2002) has suggested that these reflected a form of alternative mapping and use of plantation space to facilitate independent activity.

rice by simply cutting the bags holding them (Duncan 2007: 89–90). The workers were adept at increasing their low wages in different ways, often at the cost of the plantation. A prevalent method of resistance by workers that targeted the production was the stealing of coffee seeds for sale outside the plantations. As L. R. Jayawardena wrote:

Coffee stealing was a perennial problem for the planter and simply the result of the market value of the bean, and the production of 'native' coffee with which the stolen plantation product could be mixed and impossible afterwards to identify (Jayawardena 1963: 90).

R. B. Tytler argued the planters' view of the matter:

I have scores of times been told of such thefts committed upon my fields and ... have found the trees torn ... the branches ripped off with betel cutters and a trodden path bestrewed with droppings of coffee leading towards the village through the jungle (Jayawardena 1963: 90).

An increase of such pilfering resulted in oppressive special legislation in 1876—the Coffee Stealing Ordinance—which imposed harsh penalties, including imprisonment, for the mere possession of coffee seeds. Villagers resented this ordinance, as coffee was also grown in home gardens in the Kandyan regions. In 1879, P. Ramanathan unsuccessfully opposed the reintroduction of this special legislation on coffee-seed pilfering in the Legislative Council, denouncing it as oppressive, and 'repugnant to law and justice' (see Chapter 5).

One immediate and temporary means of fortitude and escape from reality for these workers was through excessive drinking of alcohol. Friedrich Engels, writing in 1845, commented on the drinking habits and the social problems of drunkenness among the British working-class, caused by their 'unnerved ... state of mind and body ... aggravated beyond endurance' by the conditions of their work and the uncertainties of existence. The saying was that 'getting drunk was the shortest way out of Manchester' (Phelps Brown 1959: 20). Drinking on estates, however, also stimulated social cohesion by bringing together large numbers of workers. It potentially provided them with space and activity for discussing the problems in their lives and work and they occasionally became boisterous and criticised the planters themselves. Work also slowed down as workers often turned up late the next day, a practice that was a source of irritation for the planters but accepted as inevitable under the circumstances. But some planters were also well aware of the dangers of excessive drinking and one named Harrington named the danger to life and property,

complaining that 'drinking was so very easy and unguarded that continued scenes of riots and intoxication were daily taking place' (Jayawardena 2007a: 100). Police were often mobilised to curb any violence that occurred, but the problem was never resolved.

By the end of the nineteenth century the liquor problem had become acute. A survey among planters by John Ferguson (editor of the *Ceylon Observer*) revealed that 'the habit of drinking had increased greatly' and that on some estates 25 per cent of workers 'do not work after pay day until their pay has been expended on drink'.³ The resort to liquor on payday resulted in strong language, fights and loud threats, and was a frequent means of slowing down work, and perhaps a subversive manifestation of labour resistance.

VIOLENCE AGAINST THE PLANTERS

Being exposed to extreme need also resulted in workers coming together and making demands on the planters and the government. One such incident took place in 1866, when there was a failure of the rice crop in India, leading to its shortage and consequent price rise in Ceylon and even to riots and the ransacking of shops in Colombo. Such riots, started by the estate workers, also took place in Kandy (Moldrich 1989: 82). While planters were at a Sunday morning church service in Kandy, they heard, according to the Government Agent, 'an unseemly uproar outside.' When he went out, he found estate workers breaking into rice shops where prices had been jacked up. He ordered the merchants to sell the stocks and thereby averted further trouble (Moldrich 1989).

In a highly charged total institution such as a plantation, which was controlled by force and frequent violence, it is not surprising that workers who were provoked beyond endurance would resort to acts of physical violence directed not only against immediate supervisory staff and foremen, but also against planters, kanganies and minor staff (Jayawardena 1972: 27). In some cases the kanganies themselves challenged the authority of the planters. Some of these encounters even resulted in killings. In 1866, a kangany countered with violence the criticism given to him by a planter named John Falconer of Hantane Estate, Kandy, a strict disciplinarian. The kangany informed the planter that others before him had been satisfied with his work, and 'who is to know how many days you will remain on the estate. A good many

³ *Sessional Paper* XI of 1898: 10 (cited in Jayawardena 2007a: 100).

masters have come and gone and they were all satisfied with my work.' He then killed the planter (Moldrich 1989: 82). In the 1880s, there were other reported killings of planters. A young planter named Benison was shot dead with his own gun by his male domestic worker (*appu*), who had earlier received a beating for allegedly making advances toward the planter's Sinhalese mistress (Dep 1969: 191). Another planter, also in the same period, named Johnson of Beddewela Estate, was attacked with clubs and killed by workers. He had been 'rather rough and arbitrary in the treatment of his subordinates' (Dep 1969).

Stories and legends of workers' bravery in challenging the authority of planters served as powerful reminders of the strength of the workers even under highly oppressive conditions. Valentine Daniel (1993) refers to the fact that 'estate life is filled with ... recallings and retellings' in the form of legends and folklore. One noted example he cites is about the 'Perumal Cut', the legend of a new British *sinnai dorai* who insisted on using aggressive language ('you son of a harlot') while giving wrong pruning instructions to a young worker named Perumal. The superintendent grabbed Perumal's knife and shouted 'Like this, like this. Fifteen inches above the ground.' Perumal replied, grabbing the knife back and saying 'Please not like that, not like that ... let me show you fifteen inches' and swung at the Englishman's arm with the word 'ipputti' (like this!). The result was that the Englishman's arm, which was severed from his elbow and fell in the drain, was 'exactly fifteen inches long.' As Daniel has remarked 'this infamous cut' came to be known as the 'Perumal' cut (1993: 582–83).

Violent protests by workers against the government also occurred in later periods. In June 1940, the Controller of Labour noted that the police had been forced to intervene to restore calm in cases where the superintendent's life was thought to be at risk.⁴ During the militant strike on Wewessa Estate in May 1940, there were many other violent incidents, including arrests of workers for using criminal force on the head kangany (see Chapter 10). One dramatic instance occurred in 1941 when a planter known for harsh practices, George Pope of Stellenberg Estate, Pussellawa, was murdered by a group of workers who waylaid him. This murder increased tension in the plantations, and was a particular source of concern for the government as it occurred during a period of labour unrest and the uncertainties of the Second World War. The case became a sensational one and two of the six accused were sentenced to death (Alles 1977. Also see Chapter 10).

⁴ SLNA File A/2/40 Report of 15 May 1940.

BOLTING

One of the reactions to the system of super-exploitation of the workers was the increasing incidence of 'bolting'. It was linked directly to ties of indebtedness that bound the worker to an estate, and was enforced by laws, such as the Ordinance No. 11 of 1865, which declared it a breach of contract and a criminal offence for workers to leave their place of work without having paid their debt. The planters had found such indebtedness a tried and tested method of recruitment and control of plantation labour with the state providing the necessary legal backing. 'Bolters', however, as noted earlier, could be tried under existing laws and forced back to work. Section 23 of the 1865 Ordinance also enabled the police magistrate to allow the deserter to return to his employer rather than be punished.

'Bolting' was a serious concern for the planters from the 1880s onward. We have noted in Chapter 3 that the situation worsened for the workers through the controls exerted by the kangany, who mediated on their behalf and even gave them loans, and in turn, was able to exert power and control over all aspects of their work and lives. The workers were thus in perpetual debt to the kangany who had few compunctions about using extra-legal methods (such as detaining the debtor's wife, children or other goods) to recover his money (Jayawardena 1972: 18). Where conditions became intolerable, however, a worker could run away to find employment on another estate, or escape to a village or town. It was considered by the Planters' Association of Ceylon to be the 'greatest evil in labour.'⁵ By the first decade of the twentieth century, 'bolting' had become the most important reason for estate workers to be charged in the police courts. In 1915, apart from absenteeism, some 3,500 out of the total of 4,409 estate workers were brought to Court on the charge of 'quitting service without notice' (Majoriebanks and Marakkayar 1917: para 43).

In spite of all the attempts by the planters to prevent contact between the plantation workers and the local villages, the workers defied these impositions in many ways. Workers managed to go occasionally to the nearest villages and towns for food, drink and clothing, thereby developing some minimum contact with those on the periphery of the plantations, such as local peasants, small traders, tavern keepers, schoolteachers, clerks and bus and lorry drivers. Similarly, one could not avoid the visits of some outsiders to the plantation,^s especially various itinerant merchants and

⁵ Report of a meeting of the Planters' Association of Ceylon, held on 1 November 1907, SLNA PE/2693, *Times of Ceylon*, 2 November 1907.
Digitized by Noolaham Foundation
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

vendors, barbers, washermen and others, who came on to plantations merely to sell their goods (especially cloth) and services and who, in turn, bought any excess rice from the workers (Meyer 1992). In these different ways, the workers broke the restrictions placed on them by the planters and made dents in their imposed isolation.

CULTURE AND RELIGION

In 1972, John Blassingame, an African American scholar, wrote *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* in which he recorded various forms of slave resistance in the United States of America expressed through music, dance, songs, folktales, religion and spirituality, which were influenced by the slaves' African origin and also developed as between an independent culture. He wrote: 'slaves created unique cultural forms which lightened their burden of oppression, promoted group solidarity, provided ways of verbalizing aggression, sustaining hope, building self-esteem and often represented areas of life largely free from the control of whites.' African-style 'voodoo' priests also promised relief from sickness as well as charms to make the masters kind and to harm one's enemies. When slaves began to convert to Christianity of the Baptist and Methodist variety, African-American spirituals (gospel songs), which dealt with the miseries of slavery and the search for relief from their situation, also arose. As Blassingame (1972) noted 'the songs represented their sorrows ... like tears of relief to aching hearts.'

One of the most prevalent sources of strength, common to the peasantry and urban and plantation workers in Ceylon was the expression of grievances through the oral tradition of songs and poems. Such modes of expression were useful in challenging the status quo without evoking direct opposition from the authorities. This method of protest was recorded by Major Jonathan Forbes (1841) who wrote that during the folk-singers' performance among the Kandyan peasantry, 'any sly hint' against the *rajakariya* (unpaid services to the state) 'was sure to be received with unusual satisfaction' (quoted in Gunasinghe 2007: 44).⁶ Such forms of protest through folk songs may have prevailed on the plantations from the earliest years. Workers' songs about their lives were,

⁶ In the ceremony for the exorcism of diseases prevalent among the southern Sinhalese (*yak thovil*), the 'devils' who performed sometimes used the occasion to express grievances against those who had grabbed their land and exploited them as wage labour.

no doubt, a continuation of the cultural practices in the immigrants' villages of origin in south India (Shanmugalingam 2010). The folk songs of lament concerned their fearsome journey from India to the plantations of Ceylon and the hunger, disease and oppressive conditions of work on the estates. These would surely have included sarcastic complaints against the *kanganies* and managers.

In the nineteenth century, a distinct group of professional folk artistes and singers performed and sang in Tamil in public places, including markets, festivals and ceremonies in plantations and other areas, and sold books of their songs to the audiences. These performances represented an intermingling of oral and written forms. The artistes had a basic knowledge of classical and popular religious literature and performed episodes from the epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. In an era when there were few Tamil newspapers, folk singers also composed ballads in Tamil about contemporary news and sensational events.

Some of the more socially conscious folk artistes produced a specific form of literary production, known as *Mutchanthi Illakiyam* ('literature of the junction'). One popular poet was Arulvaki Abdul Cader (1866–1918), a Tamil-speaking Muslim from Kandy who produced thirty books of popular songs including songs for the *Kummi* dance (a folk dance from southern India performed by women), songs designated as *Nondhi Chinthu*—a genre of simple songs—and *Kavadi Chinthu* songs for the *Kavadi* dance. He also took up themes on the lives of common people and his works represented a popular form of culture that influenced Tamil writers (Shanmugalingam 2010).

In 1878, a British journal, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (FLIN), had an interesting account of what was called 'A Coolie Operatic Performance in Ceylon.' The journal recorded that the 'coolies', 'who are much employed on the coffee plantations of Ceylon, or on the estates in other parts of the country, are fond of indulging in a rude species of dramatic and musical performance' (de Silva 1998: 300). The organisation of such events was 'encouraged by the *Kanganis* or chiefs of the gangs' who evidently supplied '[t]he theatrical properties ... required being a few yards of muslin and Turkey-red, a few sheets of gold and silver paper, and talc for the dresses; and a good supply of chalk, all the actors having to appear with white faces' (de Silva 1998: 300). These performances included music played by 'an orchestra of a tom-tom, castanets, and a flute'; the actors were men, 'it being considered indecent for women to perform' (de Silva 1998). What is also worth noting is that these performances often had the approval of the planter, who sometimes allowed them to take place on the lawn of his house. A rare account by a planter describes one such performance:

Soon after dark the *corps dramatique* arrives, accompanied by the rest of the Coolie men and boys, who form the bulk of the audiences, and who squat around upon the ground ... some of them volunteering to hold the torches, which are made of dried bamboo, split and tied together in small bundles. The curtain, which is, perhaps, the Sunday dress of the Kangani's wife, is held up by two men, and while the performers behind it are putting the finishing touches to their toilets, a boy, representing a 'Guru', or 'holy man', comes forward with a huge mask on his face, and, while dancing, sings a prelude or explanation of the story about to be performed (FLIN, 20 July 1878 cited in de Silva 1998: 300).

In the nineteenth century, a few planters, while recording the cultural activities of the workers, also drew sketches of their performances. Two of these illustrations were by Vereker Monteith Hamilton (1856–1931) of Scotland, who arrived in Ceylon at the age of 20 and was for a time an assistant superintendent on the Needwood coffee estate, in Haldumulla. While in Ceylon from 1876 to 1883, he did many paintings including the dances and dramas performed by plantation workers. Returning to Britain, he studied at the Royal Academy and became 'a military, landscape



FIGURE 4.1

**Dramatic performance by plantation workers,
late 1870s.**

Source: R. K. de Silva (1985).

and figure painter' (R. K. de Silva 1985: 302). Hamilton's pictures included one called 'Tan-nan-na', a drawing of a group of estate women performing a *vannam* song and dance (de Silva 1985: 329). The *vannam* was 'a mixture of emotional acting and elaborate dancing, performed in a series of interludes often portraying events connected with the life of various deities' (344). Hamilton also did a drawing of 'A Tamil Drama', with a poem by another planter, Stewart Fasson of the Oodewerra Estate, Badulla. His verses included the following:

'The Play's the thing!' so sang the world's great Bard, And e'en at Lanka
on some dark still night,
A Tamil myth is played upon the sward
By dusky forms, and the weird torchlight.

....

So as on cultured stages far away,
Where Drama's brightest banner is unfurled;
Our Tamil shows in his untutor'd play
How Love and Wit do conquer all the world.

(de Silva 1985: 340).

While these cultural activities in Tamil were an entertaining diversion, they could also be seen as a form of protest and relief from the workers' daily grind. They were also perhaps a means of occasionally expressing their grievances through the 'guru' or compere, who while narrating the plot, may have included nuanced comments on workers' hardships. The fact that religion was often intertwined in these cultural events gave a degree of legitimacy to the grievances portrayed.

PETITIONS

Another way by which workers expressed their grievances against the management was the common practice of petition writing, used by all types of workers in colonial Ceylon. The petition writer, who listed out complaints and made demands to the authorities on behalf of those who had grievances, played an important role in society. Petitions had been frequently used in the nineteenth century (in 1842 and 1858, for example) by clerks seeking higher pay and promotion, who channelled them through unofficial members of the Legislative Council. When P. Ramanathan presented the petition of clerks at the General Post Office to the legislature in 1885, the Colonial Secretary referred to this as 'a grave breach of discipline' (Jayawardena 1972: 28). However, in

1908, Governor Henry McCallum, defended to the right of petition as a 'valuable safety valve for the ventilation of grievances.'⁷

On plantations too, petition-sending became commonplace. For example, during the severe economic depression of the 1930s, a spate of petitions was sent by workers to the Controller of Labour, the Indian Agent and to Magistrates. This led to the Planters' Association asking the Controller of Labour to refer such petitions to the planters concerned, also requesting the Indian Agent, K. P. S. Menon, to ignore such petitions. Menon refused, saying that it would be 'difficult entirely to ignore petitions signed or thumb marked by labourers, no matter which source they come from' (Jayawardena 1972: 345). The earliest plantation trade union, begun in 1931, was also accused by planters of writing petitions 'setting out various grievances alleged by ignorant labourers' (1972: 346).

In these different ways, the workers resisted the slave-like conditions and pervasive controls of nineteenth-century Ceylon plantations but did not organise collectively against the exploitation they experienced on the plantations and negotiate for better conditions of work and life. Many of these inhuman features of plantation life were taken up, as we shall see in Part II of the current volume, in the political appeals and actions of several outsiders—whether individuals, organisations or governments—who protested against slavery as a barbaric practice and fought to ameliorate the grievances of plantation workers in the era before trade unionism. The anti-slavery campaign in Britain of William Wilberforce had been one of the most important and well publicised movements of the early nineteenth century, leading to the abolition of slavery in British colonies. There had also been reformist agitation in Britain by the Liberals that highlighted democratic rights as well as a rising working-class movement demanding political and economic rights and freedom of organisation. This awareness was reflected in a humanitarian concern in Britain about labour conditions in the colonies, resulting in awareness among some colonial officials that any new forms of slavery could be an embarrassment.⁸ In these different ways, as we shall see in the following chapters, the role of the 'outsiders' was significant in bringing about progressive change for the workers.

⁷ Legislative Council of Ceylon, *Minutes of Sessions 1908–9*, p. 16 (cited in Jayawardena 1972: 28).

⁸ Similar campaigns were also undertaken by European anti-slavery societies and individuals, such as the Société des Amis des Noirs (Society of the Friends of Blacks) in France, which publicly condemned slavery. As a consequence of these protests, slave trade was legally abolished in Britain and many other countries (Curtin 1998: 174–75).

PART two

Outsiders
Challenge the
Planter Raj

five

Colonial Officials Raise Concerns

It is by the labour of these people the colony is enriched and the expense necessary to prevent a scandalous mortality amongst the migrants [should be] part of the cost of that labour and as such devolves upon the colonial revenue.

The British Secretary of State, Kimberley (Andradi 2011: 315).

Many officials who served in the colonies or in the Colonial Office in London had been influenced by the ideologies associated with the Enlightenment and the events of the French Revolution and the American War of Independence. It was a period when the old order of monarchy, aristocracy and the power of the church were being challenged. Such persons were the products of nineteenth-century liberalism: they abhorred slavery and were ready to oppose anything that looked like (in Lord John Russell's words) 'a new system of slavery' (British Anti-Slavery Society 2010). As a result, from the nineteenth century onward, there was an increased emphasis on the importance of democratic rights and humanitarian concerns, with several radical members of the House of Commons in Britain protesting against the inhumane and exploitative conditions of labour in the colonies. Their sentiments were sympathetically viewed by liberal British professionals and bureaucrats residing in the colonies as well as by local reformers and Indian nationalists.

These ideas were accompanied by increasing criticism by government officials of prevailing forms of servitude such as slavery and bonded labour, which continued to be preserved through the mercantilist policies of the East India Company. There were several progressive officials in Ceylon as well, long before the development of plantations, who spoke out against slavery, feudalism and the monopolistic practices associated with

mercantilism. As early as 1805, Governor Thomas Maitland was critical of government servants for not taking adequate action against cruelty towards slaves. Another important personage was the Chief Justice of Ceylon, Alexander Johnston, who led a signatures campaign in 1815 for the abolition of slavery. Around the same period, the Collector of Customs, Anthony Bertolacci, wrote *A View of the Agricultural, Commercial and Financial Interests of Ceylon* (1817), opposing the restrictions associated with mercantilism and feudalism that prevailed in the island.

It is not surprising, therefore, that while the colonial state vigorously supported the plantation sector in the nineteenth century through favourable legislation and financial incentives, concerned officials in Ceylon and London intervened to expose and ameliorate the conditions of the plantation workers. Along with colonial bureaucrats and civil servants, some socialist and liberal politicians in Britain, even though they were outsiders, were nevertheless crucial in campaigning for improvements in worker health and education on the plantations. Even punitive laws passed by the government against workers were criticised by persons within the government. An important example of this conflict pertained to those clauses of the Coffee Stealing Ordinance of 1876 that allowed flogging and other forms of punishments for the possession of coffee seeds by workers. The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Carnarvon, expressing his 'distress' over this legislation, indicating that it has only been approved because the existing laws made provisions for the Governor to review all sentences involving flogging (Moldrich 1989: 89). This issue reflected the perennial contradiction between the planters' lobby and certain colonial officials in Britain and Ceylon.

SICKNESS AND MORTALITY

Based on experience gleaned from slave plantations, the colonial government recognised the need for large numbers of workers for the cultivation of the crops. As slavery had been abolished in the British colonies by the 1830s, the planters in Ceylon had to find another source of labour, which they did by using the kangany system. The colonial government actively encouraged this form of labour recruitment, viewing it as a form of 'free labour' that did not require government interference. Over time, however, it became clear to many concerned officials that the workers employed under this system were exposed to inhumane conditions of travel and work. As early as 1847, James Emerson Tennent, the Colonial Secretary, recorded the problems faced by the workers on

their journey to the estates, the bad quarantine conditions, including their exposure to disease, and the fact that, when ill, they were often left to die with any medical support. He reported to the authorities in London the prevalence of fever and dysentery amongst the workers as well as the lack of hospitals and adequate medical personnel.¹

The poor health facilities were not solely features of the voyage to the plantations but were equally abhorrent on the plantations themselves. In the early days of coffee planting, the general practice was for the planters to treat the sick workers themselves, resulting in completely inadequate healthcare on the estates. A government doctor, W. G. van Dort, who belonged to the local Burgher community, corresponded with the Colonial Secretary on the health condition of estate workers in 1869. According to him, the mortality rate of these workers was 'excessively high', with almost a quarter of the total arrivals of immigrant workers being unaccounted for between 1843 and 1867 (Kurian 1989: 73). Furthermore, he was of the opinion that a 'more elaborate system of Medical Police ... together with a strict enforcement of sanitary laws' in the line-rooms and estates could prevent this mortality rate. Such criticism was resented by the planters but Dr van Dort received high praise from a local radical, Charles Lorenz, who commended his courage and wrote of van Dort's 'single-handed combat' with the 'powerful planters' lobby' (Roberts, Rahim and Thomé 1989: 63).

Among other medical officials who highlighted the problems of the plantation workers was Christopher Elliott, an Irishman, who was the Assistant Colonial Surgeon of Badulla Hospital and later the editor of the *Colombo Observer* newspaper, which supported the peasant rebellion in Ceylon (Jayawardena 2010). He was a Baptist and 'a man with a strong sense of compassion', one of whose sermons was inspired by 'the sight of a Tamil woman lying on the road with her two children one of whom was dying' (Moldrich 1989: 131). Elliott, who was concerned about the health of plantation workers, stressed the importance of keeping the line-rooms clean in order to prevent illness (Moldrich 1989: 107).

A recurrent three-cornered dispute between the Colonial Office, Government of Ceylon and Planters' Association concerned the issue of responsibility for medical aid for migrant workers and how it should be funded. As Andradi (2011) noted, several government doctors had intervened on the question of high mortality rates among Indian migrant workers. Dr Coghill, the Inspector of Coffee Estates, for example, was highly critical of the plight of the workers:

¹ SLNA. 5/34. Pt. I Disp. No. 6 (Misc.) Tennent to Grey. Colombo, 21 April 1847.

They leave their homes ill-provided ... and after a fearful trail of 200 miles without sufficient food and overcome by fatigue ... they sink down to die at the door of the Matale hospital (Andradi 2011: 315).

Under these pressures, the Ceylon government passed the Medical Ordinance of 1872, whereby coffee estates were divided into districts and each district placed under a European Medical Officer, with some assistants. These officials, together with representatives from the planters, formed committees under whose control this work was organised. The government appointed an inspector to advise the committees, to inspect the hospitals and estates, to establish medical benefit schemes and to make out annual reports. In 1876, the new Principal Civil Medical Officer, Dr Kynsey, and Dr Coghill, argued that 'the government should take over responsibility for medical services in the coffee estate areas' (Andradi 2011: 335). But the government argued that it was the planters who should be liable to provide medical services for the workers. By the Ordinance of 1880, the government undertook the medical care of migrants 'but imposed an export duty on plantation produce to defray the cost' (Andradi 2011: 337). This again was opposed and the debate on the issue continued.

In 1878, another concerned official, the Assistant Government Agent in Nuwara Eliya, P. A. Murray, reported to the Planters' Association that the condition of the coffee workers was 'truly piteous' and that they arrived at the government resting places 'in a complete state of exhaustion from hunger and cold' (Moldrich 1989: 59). Murray reported that police patrols went around searching for workers in distress but they operated only during daytime and they often found the corpses of workers who had died during the night (Moldrich 1989: 160). He also tried to get the Planters' Association to support the 'homes of refuge' that he had set up in Hakgala and Pahugala for the destitute and dying plantation workers.

Under these different pressures, the government ordered a commission to investigate the subject of medical needs on the estates. Based on the findings of this investigation, Ordinance No. 17 of 1880 and No. 9 of 1882 were passed. Among its various important provisions were that hospitals and dispensaries should have personnel who could communicate with the workers in Tamil. Also, the government was to hold regular inspections of line-rooms. Furthermore, a superintendent could be prosecuted if line-rooms were not maintained 'in a fair sanitary condition', and also if he did not have information of all cases of illnesses and did not provide relief where necessary. He was obliged to send workers to the hospitals when

advised by the medical officers, keep a register of births and deaths, and give fourteen days of food and lodging to women who had just given birth to children. According to clause 21, kangannies were also to report all cases of sickness to the planter (L. Jayawardena 1960: 118–19).²

The high mortality rates amongst estate workers continued to be a source of concern for the Ceylon government as well as the Colonial Office. A detailed analysis of the different arguments put forward (including reluctance of workers to go to hospitals, limited hospital accommodation, and arrival of tired workers) suggested that a 'substantial share of the responsibility' lay in the working conditions and the planter was responsible if he did not have knowledge or take action with regard to workers who were ill (Jayawardena 1960: 138). Important in this context was the prevailing system of payment by which the workers' income depended on the number of days worked, often resulting in them working even if they were ill, a situation that was compounded by lack of observance of clause 27 of the Labour Ordinance of 1865 by which the sick were to be provided free food (Jayawardena 1960: 135). These were important considerations in the passing of the Ordinance of 1889 which compelled the employer to pay for a minimum of six days of work in the week if the worker was willing to work, whether work was available or not.³

Even in the later years, planters used their own methods to make life difficult for the medical officers who were critical of them. Natesa Aiyar, (Indian member in the Legislative Council) said that their reports were 'not so frank' as those made in 1876 due to planters' hostility:

If a medical officer happens to be a little strict, the planters will meet at their club and discuss matters, and the doctor will receive a call to answer which he will have to go some miles by car and then walk up a hill, for which he only gets paid Rs 2.50. In that way he will be taught a lesson (*Ceylon Legislative Council Debates*, 24 February 1927).

² Jayawardena's analysis suggests that 'inadequate observance' by planters and kangannies as well as a high death rate occurred during the period subsequent to the initiation of the scheme. The Medical Officers, responding to the 'enervating influence' of the 'hospitality given by the planters', appeared reluctant to prosecute them for dereliction of duty. The 'exceptional cases' of prosecution were mainly when the kangany was a fault. Furthermore, there were relatively low numbers of convictions with just eighty-seven convictions out of the 135 prosecutions that were undertaken in the initial five years of the scheme (Jayawardena 1960: 120).

³ Ordinance No. 13 of 1889, Section 6 (i) cited in Jayawardena (1960: 134, footnote 30).

The workers continued to be subject to all forms of neglect and sickness. It was not uncommon for sick workers to be robbed by the kanganies and patrols.⁴ Some even died of starvation due to neglect.⁵ The issue of workers' health continued to concern the authorities in the early twentieth century and some change did take place even among planters, and also among government officials, especially members of the judiciary. A Commission of Inquiry was appointed, when in 1914 the deplorable conditions on certain estates in the province of Sabaragamuwa came to light through the intervention of some government officials. In one case the District Judge had reported instances of starvation and illness, and on Nivitigala estate, the government agent claimed that there had been 227 deaths in 1913 (24 per cent of its labour force) and that between October 1913 and March 1914 seven workers had been found dead and six lying ill on the road near this estate. In another case in 1914, the Magistrate, A. L. Crossman, acquitted those workers who were prosecuted under the Ordinance for leaving Pinkande estate because of insufficient wages and food and bad treatment; he referred to their 'sickly and emaciated condition' and commented on the superintendent's lack of concern, neglect of the sick, and payment of inadequate wages.⁶ Arunachalam (1936) said of these cases of 'serious abuses':

Mr. A. L. Crossman, whose exposure of them led to the appointment of the Commission, received scant courtesy from the Commissioners. I do not hesitate to say that Mr. Crossman's conduct in standing up for the poor coolies and protecting them against powerful interests is worthy of the best traditions of the Ceylon Civil Service; and I for one, as an old Civil Servant, am proud of him (Arunachalam 1936: 211).

PROVIDING EDUCATION

As the workers lived and worked within the confines of the estate, the only means of their children getting education was if it was supported and arranged by the management. But setting up facilities for education was not a priority for the planters. On the contrary, they benefitted from

⁴ SLNA. PF/12. Box No. 203, 2 August 1877.

⁵ Memorandum submitted by Mr Jackson on the Control of Immigration Department Governor, 29 June 1894.

⁶ *Report of the Commission to Inquire into the Conditions of Immigrant Tamil Labourers in Sabaragamuwa*, Colombo, 1914.

the availability of cheap child labour, and were clearly not prepared to pay for the expense of setting up schools. But there were senior officials who were concerned about this issue, which became more visible as more workers and their families migrated to Ceylon in the wake of the expanding plantation sector. Sir Hercules Robinson, who had been the Governor of Ceylon between 1865 and 1872, reported in 1867 to the colonial office on the lack of schools on the estates. According to him, the Tamil Church Mission had tried to provide some education for the children of the plantation workers but 'the good result of their teaching is generally reported to be scarcely appreciable' (Moldrich 1989: 108–09). A suggestion was made in 1969 by the first Director of Public Instruction, J. H. Laurie, who urged the planters to start schools on the estates, but this proposal was not well received by government or the planters. In the absence of government initiative on education there were night schools started by kanganies for their own children (Moldrich 1989).

Child labour and the lack of education in colonial plantations was also taken up in Britain in 1903, when questions were asked in the House of Commons by the MP for Manchester, C. E. Schwann (later Swan), on the education of estate children in Ceylon.⁷ He was a well-known liberal who had earlier campaigned for the abolition of the paddy tax in Ceylon. Sir Griffin, as Chairman of the Far East India Association, supported him by saying that only forty-three estates out of 1,857 provided education facilities, with only 1,840 children being educated in schools. In response, the Ceylon government took the matter up with the planters. One suggestion to the government was that the model should be the Ordinance of 1876 on elementary education in British Guiana, by which planters would be made responsible for provision and maintenance of efficient schools and subjected to a fine of \$50 a month until a school was provided; also no child under nine years of age could be employed.⁸

The response of the planters was mainly negative. While there were some planters who saw the value of educating workers, the memorandum of the Planters' Association noted that the community was 'strongly opposed to special legislation for the education of immigrant Tamils'.⁹ Their main worry lay in the control and supply of labour and how this

⁷ *Planters' Association Year Book*, 1904.

⁸ SLNA. PF/1095. Letter from A.G. Wise to J. Harvard, Director of Public Instruction, No. 16, 1903.

⁹ SLNA. PF/1095. Enclosure in letter sent to the Colonial Secy, 15 September 1904.

could be maintained. To that end, many arguments were put forward. The Chairman of the Planters' Association noted in 1903 that 'the chief reason that more estate children do not learn to read and write is indifference on the part of the parents', and that 'the estate coolie is not likely to feel the want of an education.' The planters' overriding concern with labour supply is brought out in the observation that 'universal education has, in England, denuded the agricultural districts of labour, and a too rapid spread of education among the same class in Ceylon, might bring about a similar result.'¹⁰ The planters' opinion was that 'compulsory education on estates would seriously complicate the labour problem.'¹¹

These same attitudes were expressed in a report by a civil servant, S. M. Burrows, who having dismissed the idea of educating girls and older people, wrote:

... the sole question we are discussing is whether the Tamil immigrant boys of school-going age have sufficient facilities for learning the rudiments of Tamil reading and writing and of simple arithmetic ... It would be unreasonable to maintain that the ordinary Tamil coolie, the subject of this inquiry, has any present need for a higher class of education than that already detailed. The question of intellectual aspirations may be dismissed as irrelevant under the circumstances.

Burrows expressed extreme diehard views and even attacked British philanthropists:

It is beyond dispute that every coolie who comes to live and work on a tea estate is subjected to educational influences of a disciplinary kind ... To deprive the parents of this natural aid by a drastic measure of education would deal a serious blow at the labour supply, on which the prosperity of the island so largely depends, and would certainly re-introduce infanticide, which is hardly what English philanthropists would desire. It is this interference with labour hours that makes aided schools unpopular with the coolies—nor have they yet reached a stage of civilisation which makes it necessary to treat them as English children are treated.¹²

¹⁰ SLNA. PF/1095. Letter from Chairman, Planters' Association of Ceylon, to Col. Secy, 30 July 1903.

¹¹ Summary by Mr Scott. 16 November 1903, *Planters' Association Year Book*, 1904.

¹² 'The Education of Immigrant Tamil Coolie Children employed on Estates', Public Instruction Office, Colombo. SLNA. PF/1095. enclosed in Dispatch No. 354m, 25 August 1904.

In spite of people like Burrows who supported the attitude and position of the planters, there were other bureaucrats who were keen to provide some education to the children of the plantation workers. This interest led to a government enquiry on the question in 1905, and ignoring opposition from planters, Ordinance No. 8 of 1907 was passed. Section 29 stipulated that:

It shall be the duty of the Superintendent of every estate to provide for the vernacular education of the children of the labourers employed on the estate between the ages six to ten, and set apart and keep in repair a suitable school-room (Ordinance 8 of 1907).

The Ordinance, however, did not require compulsory attendance, resulting in the law being 'somewhat ineffective'. Many children, particularly girls, did not attend schools. In 1915, there were some 16,622 children on the estates of school-going ages, of whom just 6,056 were boys and 1,161 girls actually attended schools (Majorie banks and Marakkayar 1917). But the government did take measures to improve education for the estate workers, and a sub-Inspector of Schools was appointed in 1915 to check on the educational possibilities of estates which did not have schools, even if 'the teaching was confined to the three R's in Tamil'. These measures did result in an increase of schools on the estates. While in 1904, sixty schools catered to 2,000 children; by 1920, there were 275 schools with 11,500 children, who formed only 17 per cent of the children of school-going age.

The questions of estate children's education was again taken up by the colonial government and new legislation was enacted in 1920 whereby plantations that had over twenty-five children had to provide an elementary vernacular education for those between the ages of six and ten, and appoint competent teachers and maintain a suitable schoolroom. Plantations could combine to provide a common school, and the attendance of children in school was made obligatory on the parents. The whole issue of estate children's education and child labour became a public concern and the *Ceylon Daily News* raised the issue:

Civilisation has learned to abhor child labour as an abomination. In this country, this abomination is defended as a stern necessity. This only proves how much more necessary it has been to introduce a more humane occupation into the prevailing ideas about labour (*Ceylon Daily News*, 10 January 1920).

The planters were aware of the potential of education to increase workers' consciousness, which could result in organised labour protests

against the conditions of work and life labour conditions on the estates. While the planters claimed that putting children in schools would deprive the workers of income (from child labour) and would even cause a shortage of labour for the cultivation purposes, they may also have been largely motivated by the threat being surrounded by large numbers of educated, defiant workers would pose to their security. Thus, as discussed in Chapter 3, restricting education was a conscious labour-control strategy that was successfully implemented for several decades.

But the enactment and enforcement of Education Ordinance of 1920 and the efforts to remedy the defects and the syllabus of plantation schools by the Department of Education in 1937 with the appointment of better qualified teachers were important in improving the educational levels of the children on plantations. But the education remained far below the national standard. And in most estates, the schools continued to be mere 'cattle sheds' run by unqualified teachers.

Nevertheless, colonial officials and other outside influences had important consequences for the development of the labour movement on the plantations. In the subsequent chapters we shall see that a crucial factor in the success of unions from 1930s onwards was the active presence of young workers who had received some education. In spite of its relatively poor quality, the spread of education produced a generation of youth who were able to understand and challenge the inequities of the plantation system.¹³ It was the planters' nightmare, which became a reality in spite of their efforts to contain the workers as a 'captive' and 'docile' labour force.

¹³ The table below shows that while there were just sixty schools in 1904, the numbers had increased substantially by the 1940s with significantly more pupils accessing basic education.

TABLE 5.1: NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AND CHILDREN ON ESTATES

Year	Schools	Pupils	Children of School-going Age
1904	60	2,000	Not available
1910	227	11,500	Not available
1920	275	11,000	68,000
1930	501	26,000	78,000
1935	608	38,000	73,000
1938	784	44,000	77,000
1939	820	45,000	79,000
1940	845	47,000	80,000

Source: Annual Reports of the Indian Agent, 1940.

By the late 1930s, the younger generation of workers was no longer 'compliant' and submissive' but prepared to challenge the inequities of the Planter Raj. Even at the turn of the century, several planters remarked that children who had been to school were more efficient workers. By 1939, a few boys who had passed the Junior School Certificate had taken subordinate jobs as clerks on the plantations, but many who had been educated up to this level still worked in the field. The Controller of Labour, Frank Gimson, reported that 'the educated labour force had produced a type of worker who will not be content to pursue that routine form of occupation which his parents have followed.'¹⁴ These elements among the plantation workers emerged as 'natural leaders,' as their education gave them the ability to challenge the kangany and argue with him on behalf of the workers (Administrative Report of the Controller of Labour 1939).

In conclusion, in spite of being part of the colonial establishment, there were several British officials who protested against the abuses of the Planter Raj, including government officials and doctors. Although bound by the rules and constraints of bureaucracy, these individuals were successful in raising important social concerns that, over time, influenced the passing of legislation dealing with some of the worst abuses of the plantation system. In the late 1920s and 1930s another significant set of outside interventions from concerned bureaucrats and socialists as well as academics and intellectuals such as Sydney Webb, Drummond Shields, Malcolm MacDonald and Frank Gimson promoted the acceptance of collective bargaining and trade union recognition (see Chapter 13).

¹⁴ Administrative Reports of the Controller of Labour 1939.

Urban Professionals Protest

'... our form of slavery hides its head under the name of 'Free Labour'.

P. Arunachalam (1936: 217), emphasis added.

Several urban liberals and radicals in Ceylon also spoke up about the deplorable conditions on plantations, criticising the planters, whom they viewed as responsible for this situation. They were, like some of the officials discussed in Chapter 5, also influenced by the ideas associated with nineteenth-century liberalism and did not hesitate to raise their voices to promote the right of individuals to live in freedom and dignity. The conditions of work and life on the plantations, as well as the slave-like controls placed on the workers, were clearly anathema to such progressive thinking, and it was not surprising that they highlighted the plight of the workers and condemned practices that they viewed as backward and regressive.

MUTTU COOMARASWAMY SPEAKS ON BEHALF OF 'OUR COUNTRYMEN'

The first Ceylonese political figure to raise the problems of plantation workers was Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy, whose family came from Manipal in Jaffna and established itself in Colombo in the early nineteenth century. Members of this family benefitted from an education in English at leading Colombo schools and made judicious marriages into prominent Tamil trading families. They also acquired a reputation for political liberalism and were able to use tradition and modernity in their advance in colonial

society. Muttu Coomaraswamy's father, Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy, was a prominent figure in the Tamil community of Colombo. Educated in English, he became the chief Tamil interpreter for the Governor and was awarded the title of Mudaliyar. In 1816, influenced by the Chief Justice Alexander Johnston, Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy was one of the signatories, along with many liberal-minded persons, to the appeal for the abolition of slavery in Ceylon.

Muttu Coomaraswamy had his education in English at the Colombo Academy (Royal College) from 1842 to 1851, where he received an education modelled on British public schools, concentrating heavily on the classics. He was later appointed Police Magistrate. Being ambitious to advance in colonial society, he travelled to Britain and from 1862 to 1865, studied law in London, becoming the first person who was neither a Christian nor a Jew to be called to the bar. He led an active social life in London and completed a Grand Tour of Europe, became a member of the prestigious and exclusive Athenaeum Club and established contact with senior British politicians (Jayawardena 2007: 213). At a time when there were few Indians or Ceylonese who moved in British 'high society', 'he starred in London as an Eastern Prince.... He knew how to do it with Oriental magnificence and show, and was taken in hand by Richard Monkton Miles (a British Member of Parliament) and trotted through the best London drawing rooms.... His perfect manners, handsome presence and good English ... carried him through' (Weinman 1947:16). As E. F. C Ludowyk remarked, he was an 'interesting and even flamboyant personality' (Jayawardena 2007a: 214). He married a British Theosophist named Elizabeth Beeby; their son was Ananda Coomaraswamy who, in later years, commented on his father thus: 'He had become exceedingly westernised. At that time it was necessary both that we should adapt ourselves to a changed environment and also prove ourselves capable of achieving the attainments of western men' (Durairaja Singham cited in Jayawardena 2007a: 214).

Muttu Coomaraswamy returned to Ceylon where he was appointed the Tamil representative in the Legislative Council and on several occasions spoke about the conditions of plantation workers. In 1877, he protested about the conditions of the Indian migrant workers who were kept in quarantine under 'inhuman' conditions, without proper food in dirty, overcrowded small boats (*dhonies*), 'huddled together in large numbers' in conditions likely to spread the disease they were quarantined against (Moldrich 1989: 47 citing Hansard 24 October 1877). The government reduced the period of quarantine from fourteen to five days for 'native craft', which the Planters' Association said were inadequate, suggesting

land quarantine in Colombo instead. Coomaraswamy intervened to agree, adding that he spoke 'not so much in the interests of the planters who had made themselves powerfully heard' but on behalf of the workers whom he described as 'fellow countrymen' belonging, as Moldrich writes, 'to the same nation as he did and though poor and humble ... as entitled to fair treatment at the hands of the government as any other class' (Moldrich 1989: 47). Coomaraswamy's reference to 'fellow countrymen' was indeed remarkable, and he was probably the first Ceylonese politician to actually visit the estates and speak of a common identity with Tamil Indian migrant labour, sentiments not heard of even in later periods. In his tour of coffee estates in the late 1870s, he reported that while in some the conditions were good in many others he found 'cases of suffering' (Moldrich 1989: 83).

Muttu Coomaraswamy strongly influenced his nephews Ramanathan and Arunachalam who also came to the forefront of national politics in their campaigns for the rights of Indian migrant workers and other issues, living up to the liberal traditions of the family. Their mother was Sellachchi, daughter of Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy and sister of Muttu Coomaraswamy. She married Arunachalam Ponnambalam from Manipal a relative who had moved to Colombo as a young man and had been educated while living in Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy's home. Ponnambalam became the cashier of the Colombo *kachcheri* (district administrative office), and a private banker to several officials including Governor Torrington, Government Agent Philip Wodehouse and Sir Emerson Tennent, making friends with 'the leading Englishmen of the day' (Vythilingam 1971: 51–52). The sons of Ponnambalam and Sellachchi, in keeping with the Coomaraswamy tradition, were also involved in politics. P. Coomaraswamy was the Tamil member of the Legislature as was P. Ramanathan, while P. Arunachalam, a civil servant, also became, on retirement, not only a leader of social and political movements but also of workers' organisations.

P. RAMANATHAN PROTESTS 'OPPRESSIVE LEGISLATION'

As noted in Chapter 4, one of the ways the workers resisted the high degree of control imposed on them was to steal and sell coffee beans. This sort of 'pilfering', typical of the 'weapons of the weak', resulted in the 'Coffee Stealing Ordinance' of 1876, when punishments were introduced for the possession of coffee seeds. When the question of reintroducing this law came up in 1879, Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851–1930), a

member of the Legislative Council, opposed this special legislation on pilfering of coffee, which he called 'oppressive to the people of the country' and 'plainly repugnant to law and justice' (Thondaman 1987: 45-46). According to him, one of the clauses would have the following results:

... coffee should not be loaded or unloaded at night ... except in a certain specified way ... if I have green coffee in my possession, I am presumed to have stolen it, and the onus is on me to prove that I have not stolen it: nor can I buy coffee from a labourer or even a carrier unless I keep a book and call in a police inspector to attest the transaction; and if I do not produce the book ... I may be imprisoned for three months (see Thondaman 1987).

He was also the first person to publicly speak out as early as the 1870s in the legislature on behalf of the plantation workers and to highlight the oppressive legislation concerning 'coffee stealing'. He spoke out against the flogging that was allowed by the Coffee Ordinance indicating that 'the lash on the guilty cuts not only the guilty but even the innocent' (Moldrich 1989: 89). Ramanathan, who was a member of the Legislative Council from 1879 to 1892, was also critical of the colonial government in other matters, and spoke up for popular causes affecting the local Sinhala-Buddhist population such as making the Buddhist *Vesak* day a public holiday (Jayawardena 1972: 62).

Ramanathan took up the urgent issue of the high mortality rates among the plantation workers in the Legislative Council and argued that they were the result of lack of adequate medical facilities. He pointed out that there were 1,357 estates that employed 275,000 to 300,000 workers, and that out of the thirty-nine coffee districts only twenty-one had medical facilities. Each district had an average of sixty-five estates and 15,000 workers and a single doctor to cater to the medical needs of those residing within the district. It was clear that it was not possible for a single doctor to look after so many and as a result most of the medical attention was given to the planter and his immediate family with the 'coolies left to die at the rate of 60 per thousand, three times as much as the normal mortality rate' (Moldrich 1989: 158).

H. J. C. PEREIRA OPPOSES 'REFINED SLAVERY'

The legal control of the plantation workers was most effectively ensured through the provisions of the Labour Ordinance of 1865; under this law,

reminiscent of slavery, plantation workers, domestic servants, skilled workers and journeymen artificers who left their employers without a month's notice or reasonable cause, or were disobedient or insolent could be punished with a fine or imprisonment and be ordered to return to the employer. It was a case of treating breach of contract as a criminal offence. This law was also enforced against the first strikers in Ceylon, namely, the printers of Cave & Co in Colombo, who struck work in 1893, protesting delays in wage payments. This was, however, a rare instance, since the law had been intended to control plantation labour. The use of the law against urban labour attracted hostile comment. After the printers' strike, a young lawyer, H. J. C. Pereira, who appeared for William, one of the strikers' leaders, wrote an article titled 'Refined Slavery', attacking the Labour Ordinance as 'a disgrace to the English government' and adding 'Let us hope that the result of this prosecution will be to incite all workmen in Ceylon to strenuously agitate for the repeal of that cruel and obnoxious legislative enactment' (Jayawardena 1972: 100-01). Planters, however, continued to use the ordinance to suppress labour and the issue became one of the scandals of the time. In 1913, for example, there were 1,462 cases of workers being sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for leaving their employment, an increase over the figure of 1,160 in 1912 (*Report of the Commission to Inquire into the Conditions of Immigrant Tamil Labourers*, 1914).

An important source of outside pressure about labour conditions in the plantations came from the more politically and socially concerned liberal sections of the urban middle class, who, in the years after 1912, had begun to form organisations demanding political and social reforms as well as improved conditions for urban and estate workers. Influenced by nationalist agitation in India, Ireland, Egypt and China and linking with British liberals and socialists, local nationalists led several movements, including the Ceylon Reform League (1906), the semi-political temperance agitation (1912), the Young Lanka League advocating self-government (1915), the Railway Workers Association (1912), the Social Service League (1915), the Ceylon Workers Welfare League (1919), Ceylon Workers Federation (1920), the Ceylon Labour Union (1922) and the Ceylon National Congress (1919) (see Jayawardena 1972). Liberal and radical members of the intelligentsia were able, in the years between 1913 and 1922, to continuously raise the question of repressive legal and economic conditions of plantation workers. In this campaign, their outside support for the cause came from British reformists and from the more enlightened elements of the colonial bureaucracy in London, New Delhi and Colombo.

P. ARUNACHALAM AND LABOUR RIGHTS

A key campaigner for political reforms and the rights of workers was Ponnambalam Arunachalam (1853–1924), the younger brother of P. Ramanathan. Educated at Royal College (Colombo), he graduated from Cambridge, and up to 1913, held important positions in the Ceylon Civil Service. Even during his tenure as a government servant, he had identified himself with Buddhist and Hindu reformist movements and the temperance campaign. After retirement there were no constraints on his involvement and he emerged as the leading public intellectual of the period, championing self-government, becoming the first president of the Ceylon National Congress in 1919 and being accepted as an outstanding leader by Sinhalese politicians. Influenced by British labour leaders and socialist writers—some of whom were his life-long friends—and also by Indian leaders such as Gokhale, Tilak and Gandhi, Arunachalam's political views were far more radical than those of the rest of the local nationalist leaders. 'What a jewel in the Crown of England! Famine-stricken, perishing India!' he wrote to his friend, the socialist writer Edward Carpenter, expressing his views on British colonialism (Arunachalam & Carpenter 1927, cited in Jayawardena 1972: 206).

In the agitation on behalf of both urban and rural labour, Arunachalam made a radical contribution. In 1913 he signed a dissenting report as a member of the Commission appointed to report on the railway strike of 1912, stating bluntly and perceptively that

Ceylon cannot be expected to be untouched by the wave of discontent among the proletariat of the world, especially when local reasons were not wanting—the dissatisfaction of the workmen with their wages, the unsympathetic treatment, and the accumulative influence of many little grievances which must exist where large masses of men are employed. (Sessional Paper 1 of 1913, p. XIV cited in Jayawardena 1972: 3).

The most important outside intervention of radicals into matters concerning plantation workers at the time was the ten-year campaign by Arunachalam, from around 1912, for the abolition of the penal clauses of the Labour Ordinance as well as agitation over low pay and bad conditions of work. On retiring from the civil service, Arunachalam visited England and in July 1913 he addressed a letter (significantly from the Reform Club in Pall Mall) to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, L. Harcourt, stating that 'cases have occurred where even women were repeatedly sent to gaol for refusing to go back to their employer on the estate and where the

labourers 'remonstrance as to insufficient pay or erroneous pay has been punished, as insolence, with imprisonment' (Arunachalam 1936: 201-2). Arunachalam requested that any proposed political reforms in Ceylon should include 'minimum wages for estate workers and the exemption of women and minors from imprisonment' for breaches of the labour law, and in the case of adult males, that police magistrates should administer the law 'with leniency.' On this occasion, he also gave a talk at the Colonial Office on 'Labour in Ceylon' where he elaborated on plantation workers' conditions, including child labour and low wages:

Till recently it was no uncommon thing to see in the papers advertisements offering rewards for the arrest of runaway labourers, including women and children. These public advertisements have now ceased owing to the efforts of some of us, but arrests and imprisonments continue (Arunachalam 1936).

Arunachalam continued the campaign through the Social Service League in Colombo. In August 1916, at a lecture to the League at the Pettah Library by Prof. G. H. Leonard of Bristol University, he again hit out at the labour laws and their affinity to slavery. To illustrate this 'form of slavery', he provided the following evidence:

I hold in my hand an advertisement ... in a daily paper a few days ago, which recalls the slavery days in the Southern States of America. It offers a reward of Rs 50/- ... to any person who arrests half a dozen bolted coolies from an estate in Matale. Among them is a woman who is described as 'sickly', with a baby in arms and a boy eight years and a girl three years'. I wonder that the Superintendent of the Estate was not ashamed to insert such an advertisement and to organize a hunt for a poor sickly woman with a baby in arms and burdened with two more children (Arunachalam 1936).

Arunachalam himself gave the reply to the question he had raised and castigated the public for its indifference: 'No, I do not wonder at this. The Superintendent knew the Ceylon public. They are so demoralized and dead to all right feeling that they see nothing out of the way in such a proceeding' (Arunachalam 1936: 216). On this occasion, he appealed for support from 'all noble men and women of England, the champions of the poor and the outcast in all lands, to eradicate this cancer from our beautiful island', adding 'I feel sure that we can count on the support of Professor Leonard and all whom he can influence' (1936: 217).

This appeal was perhaps a further reminder to the local colonial government that agitation and pressure from Britain could prove embarrassing; significantly, two weeks later, the Ceylon government considered change. It had been vacillating on the problem since sections of the bureaucracy and planter opinion were against change. But there were instances when the Social Service League brought individual cases to the notice of the government, and clemency was shown. For example, in May and June 1916, the League successfully asked for remission of sentence on two women sentenced to a month's rigorous imprisonment by the Badulla police magistrate on a charge of insolence, and in another similar case, of a two month sentence 'on a woman with a baby at the breast' in which case the Governor was 'pleased to remit the unexpired portion of the sentence' (Arunachalam 1936: 217).

The publicity surrounding these events resulted in a Planters' Association meeting where issues of labour conditions and labour laws were discussed, and some planters voiced strong criticisms of their fellow planters and the laws. One of them, E. E. Megget, stated that 'the labour laws in Ceylon were a disgrace to the Island' and another planter said 'the Sabaragamuwa Commission vindicated the Tamil coolies in that district and brought to light unscrupulous behaviour of one of the planting community' (Arunachalam 1936: 220). Also notable was another unusually forthright letter from a planter to the *Times of Ceylon* which stated

The labourer is worthy of his hire, and no labourer more worthy than the Tamil cooly on our tea and rubber estates. He is our wealth, he it is who pays us our fat, off-times bloated dividends. He it is who has made Ceylon what she is. Let us give him his 'hire'; he has surely earned it, aye, and 'paid' for it (*Times of Ceylon*, 11 August 1916 quoted in Arunachalam 1936: 220).

There was some concern among planters that if labour conditions on the Island were unsatisfactory and repressive labour ordinances were not repealed, the Indian government might prevent the migration of workers. This was considered probable, especially since in early 1916, imprisonment for labour offences had been abolished in Fiji, British Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica (Arunachalam 1936: 220–21). Other important 'weapons' that could be used to embarrass the government were appeals over the heads of the local British bureaucrats, to the Colonial Office, and to other pressure groups in Britain. As Arunachalam indicated in 1916, in a letter to the Governor on behalf of the Social Service League, 'The League is in correspondence with Members of Parliament in Great Britain to strengthen the hands of Government' (Arunachalam 1936: 210).

Thus, by 1916, there was considerable pressure on the government in Colombo to change the repressive laws. Even earlier in 1914, the Secretary of State for the Colonies had urged the Governor to modify the penal clauses stating that it was 'undesirable that the penalty of imprisonment for offences of this nature should apply to women and children' (Jayawardena 1972: 201). With the campaign gaining momentum by 1916, the local Attorney-General, Anton Bertram, drafted a bill exempting women and children from imprisonment, but making provision for a female over 16 to be imprisoned for drunkenness, insolence or other misconduct; Bertram argued that women could not be completely exempted as this would be detrimental to estate discipline: 'labourers employed on estates are very primitive and a woman may be quite as capable of giving trouble as a man' (Jayawardena 1972: 209).

Arunachalam continued the campaign, further irritating the colonial authorities by sponsoring public lectures in Colombo and by visiting Labour Party Members of Parliament and critics of colonialism such as Rev. C. F. Andrews, a close collaborator of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. Andrews had investigated and reported on the degrading and miserable conditions of Indian migrants in Fiji. In June 1919, Arunachalam, along with others, formed the Ceylon Workers Welfare League to agitate for better conditions for workers and in September 1920, sponsored a lecture by Andrews on 'The Labour Movement' at the Tower Hall. On this occasion, Arunachalam referred to the purpose of Andrew's visit to Sri Lanka thus:

His aim and the aim of the League is to ascertain the truth and nothing but the truth. His instructions are to survey ... the whole field of labour, its living and working conditions and especially the bearing on them of penal clauses of the Labour Ordinance and the question of a remunerative wage (Arunachalam 1936: 226).

By 1920 the Workers Welfare League was expanded to become the Ceylon Workers' Federation, which organised a public meeting in January 1921 for Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, a Labour Member of Parliament. Wedgwood had frequently taken up issues affecting colonial peoples, and opposed the excesses during martial law on the island in 1915, also speaking in favour of constitutional reform. In a welcome speech, Arunachalam did not mince his criticism of officials. He introduced Wedgwood as 'a delegate of the great British Labour Party sent out to study and improve the conditions of the millions of their helpless brother-workers in India and Ceylon':

... The Federation welcomes you personally as a life-long worker for the oppressed and down-trodden of all lands and as the fearless champion of the British ideals of liberty, self-development and self-determination for all peoples ... These ideals are no mere lip-words to you, as unfortunately they are with many of your countrymen out in the East and even in Downing Street (1936: 228).

Arunachalam also spoke of his own role on behalf of labour, describing the workers as 'ill-educated, disorganized, weak and helpless', but added that nevertheless, 'some of us, their well-wishers, felt that it was our duty to protect them until they were able to protect themselves' (1936: 229). He highlighted two issues in relation to plantation labour: first, the penal clauses which 'have been a public scandal for years' on which 'I have pressed ... in season and out ... both on the local Government and the Colonial Office and the India Office, but we never got beyond talk' (1936: 230-1); and second, the issue of wages and conditions on which he said:

... the financial crisis is being taken advantage of to reduce the miserable wages drawn by the coolies ... There is no provision under our law for a minimum subsistence wage or to regulate the hours of labour. Children under twelve are forced to labour and were liable, until we raised an outcry, to be arrested ... and sent to jail' (Arunachalam 1936: 241).

On this occasion Colonel Wedgwood not only urged franchise rights for the working class, but also said that the workers needed proper organisation, and the development of 'a real class consciousness' so that their strike action would be successful (*Ceylon Daily News*, 28 January 1921). In the audience were future leaders of the labour movement, including A. E. Goonesinha, who were inspired by Wedgwood.

By 1922, important changes had taken place in Ceylon; political pressure by the Ceylon National Congress had led to constitutional reforms in the early 1920s, which, for the first time, created an elected Legislative Council with an unofficial majority. Even more significantly for labour, in 1922, the radicals of earlier political and social movements led by A. E. Goonesinha formed the Ceylon Labour Union, a militant trade union that led urban labour in a series of dramatic strikes in the 1920s, including a general strike in 1923. Clearly the time had come for minimum changes to be made, and in 1922, the government finally abolished the penal provisions of the 1865 Labour Ordinance. It had been a long campaign for Arunachalam, who was also involved in political activity for home rule. Aged 71, he died in 1924 before the other changes occurred.

The interventions of Muttu Coomaraswamy, the brothers P. Ramanathan and P. Arunachalam as well as the lawyer H. J. C. Pereira were important in highlighting some of the worst labour practices in the island. These urban professionals were pioneers in emphasising that no worker, urban or plantation, should be subject to oppressive labour laws. They were courageous in confronting the colonial government policy on labour and played key roles in challenging the authority of the Planter Raj. These protests took on additional significance with the agitation by Indian nationalists and social reformers, as discussed in the following chapter.

I want the labourers, to understand that I am but one of you and have been casting my lot with you ever since my visit to South Africa nearly 30 years ago.

M. K. Gandhi, Speech to the Ceylon plantation workers 1927
(cited in Gopalkrishna Gandhi 2002a: 86).

The workers on the plantations were ideologically influenced by the political changes that were taking place in India, most significantly by the Indian national movement and its leaders, as well as the anti-Brahmin movement amongst the Tamils in south India. The five decades between 1890 and 1940, when the migration of Indian Tamil workers to Sri Lanka increased rapidly, were also the period in which the Indian national movement and other important social movements in India became widespread. The Indian National Congress had been formed in 1885 and by 1905 had spread to various parts of India. In the following years, political agitation intensified, the peak periods of upheaval being the noncooperation movement and the civil disobedience movement of the early 1930s under the leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, popularly referred to as Mahatma Gandhi. In south India there were also movements that challenged the domination of Brahmins in politics and society. Large masses of Indian men and women participated in these struggles, and such events were widely reported in Ceylon. The Tamil migrants to Ceylon were aware of the upheavals during these periods of intense political and social agitation in India; and workers, minor staff and school teachers on estates were able to keep abreast of Indian events and communicate this knowledge with others. The second half of the nineteenth century and the earliest years of the twentieth century also witnessed the

beginnings of a political consciousness with regard to 'Indianness' and 'Tamil identity' among plantation workers in Ceylon.

D. M. MANILAL AND INDIAN LABOUR

The question of plantation workers' rights also became an international issue, attracting the attention of pressure groups and concerned individuals before agitation surfaced in the plantation sector itself. Among the organisations abroad that took up these workers' rights were the Anti-Slavery Society and the Indian Overseas Association in Britain and the Indian Colonial Society in Madras (now Chennai). Individual British politicians, academics and social reformers as well as Indian nationalists raised the issue of the exploitation of Indian labour in the colonies. In Ceylon, the first Indian to make a dramatic move on this question was Manilal Maganlal Doctor (1881–1956), known also as Doctor Manilal and D. M. Manilal. He was given a deportation order in 1922 by the Ceylon government but not before he had drawn attention to the Indian labour question. He also made his expulsion an occasion for anti-government agitation among sections of Indians, Tamils and Sinhalese in Ceylon. Born in Baroda, Manilal qualified as a lawyer in Bombay and was also called to the bar in Middle Temple, London in 1907. He was a close associate of Gandhi who advised him to visit Mauritius as the Indians there needed lawyers. From 1907 to 1910, Manilal became a controversial figure in Mauritius, defending Indians in court cases, clashing with the magistrates over the wearing of the Indian turban in court, challenging the racism of the local whites and appearing for Indian estate workers and cane farmers in labour disputes, including a famous case where some of the workers of Labourdonnais estate had killed a tyrannical white overseer (Napal 1963).

In Mauritius, Manilal's activities became overtly political. In 1909 he started a weekly—the *Hindusthani*—writing in the first issue that 'one man or one race cannot, morally speaking, enslave, dominate, or even exploit another for mere private gain.' The paper, which denounced the system of indentured labour, was 'suspected of stirring up the Indians against their employers' (Tinker 1974: 230). Manilal organised meetings to highlight the question of indentured labour and started other activities among Indians, including the Young Men's Hindu Association. He also campaigned on constitutional reform and the electoral representation of Indians. The French plantation owners raised the cry of '*le péril asiatique*' and frequently attacked Manilal in their papers. In 1910, Manilal took an action for libel against the paper *La Dépêche*, which accused him of

coming to Mauritius to create trouble among the Indian community. The case raised a stir. Manilal explained the ideas of passive resistance in court and claimed that he had come to Mauritius to serve the Indians on Gandhi's instructions. Manilal lost the case and returned to India to publicise the oppression of Indian labour in Mauritius. His career became linked with Indian nationalism. At the 1910 and 1911 sessions of the Indian National Congress, he raised the question of the abolition of indentured Indian labour. He visited Britain and then travelled to South Africa in 1911 where he joined Gandhi (Napal 1963).

Manilal began a long period of wandering. He was in Fiji from 1912 to 1920 where he not only took on legal cases of Indian workers but also agitated against racism in political representation. He started a weekly journal, the *Indian Settler*, in 1917, which began a campaign against the indenture system. He also formed the Indian Imperial Association to focus on the problems of Indian settlers and workers, which sharply criticised the colonial administration. In January 1920 Manilal was involved in a strike of Indian workers in the public works department, who were then joined by sugar plantation workers, one of whom was shot dead by a planter in the course of the agitation. The demonstrations that followed were quelled by the local army and by naval forces from Australia and New Zealand, thus leading to the collapse of the strike. The Governor acted swiftly and by March 1920 Manilal, his wife and two other leaders were blamed for the riots and expelled from Fiji. Subsequently, Manilal was refused permission to practice in New Zealand, where police had grown suspicious of his public lecture on working-class solidarity, which had cited a book called *Red Europe* written by an Australian Member of Parliament named Frank Anstey. These activities placed Manilal under suspicions of being a communist. He was also refused entry into Australia and Singapore. Gandhi commented on the hounding of Manilal in *Young India* in January 1921: 'An Empire that requires such calculated persecution of a man without trying to prove anything against him deserves only to be dissolved' (Napal 1963).

Manilal and his wife Jayunkvar (who was also an activist) arrived in Ceylon in October 1921, a period when the nationalist and labour movements were making headway. While in Colombo, Manilal moved with Indian and Ceylonese radicals and nationalists including Natesa Aiyar, Lawrie Muttukrishna, (President of the Indian Association), and C. H. Z. Fernando of the Young Lanka League. The Ceylon government, knowing of Manilal's earlier record, was uneasy that his stay might coincide with the Prince of Wales' scheduled visit to the Island in 1922. The Governor issued a deportation order on Manilal under a wartime

proclamation based on the Order in Council of 1896. In January 1922, the Indian Association organised a meeting at the Tower Hall, Colombo to protest against the deportation order and the arbitrary powers of the Governor. An advertisement calling for the meeting was signed by many leading Indian professionals and traders in the island, including the future trade union leader, Natesa Aiyar. On the platform were Lawrie Muttukrishna and several Indians, as well as some political reformers and Theosophists—M. U. Moore, D. B. Jayatilake, Dr C.A. Hewavitarna, D. S. Senanayake, C. W. W. Kannangara, P. de Silva Kularatne, and two women, Lilamani Muttukrishna and Dr Nalamma Satyawagiswara Iyer. Among the speakers were the labour leader, A. E. Goonesinha and C. H. Z. Fernando, a member of the legislature and Colombo Municipal Council who espoused labour causes. Two resolutions were passed. One stated that ‘the meeting of Indians resident in Ceylon protest to the Secretary of State for the Colonies against the order of deportation issued by the Ceylon government on M. Manilal’, and referring to the ‘serious and arbitrary infringement of the rights and liberties of a British citizen’ requested the ‘withdrawal of powers which render it impossible for the colonial government to exercise in peace time, emergency measures having reference to periods of war and civil commotion or revolt.’ The second resolution briefly stated that ‘the Tamils and Sinhalese assembled in this meeting unite in requesting the Governor to rescind the order of deportation on Manilal’ (*Ceylon Daily News*, 9 January 1922).

In the Colombo Municipal Council, C. H. Z. Fernando brought a motion condemning the deportation order, stating that it was ‘likely to create the impression abroad that the city of Colombo is under despotic rule.’ The motion only got the votes of A. E. de Silva and Dr E. V. Ratnam; the nays included all the European members, as well as C. P. Dias, Arthur Alvis, Dr W. P. Rodrigo and Abdul Cader (*Ceylon Daily News*, 7 and 11 January 1922). Some local newspapers also condemned the deportation order. The *Morning Leader*, mentioning the link between Manilal and Gandhi, alleged that the government distrusted Manilal as a ‘missionary of non-cooperation’ who would ‘tell our patriots of Gandhi and his great doings’ (*Ceylon Morning Leader*, 8 January 1922), while the *Ceylon Daily News*, referring to the ‘Gilbertian drama which the Ceylon Government has been acting as a Christmas diversion’, perceptively observed: ‘When the Ceylon government ... deports him the impression is bound to be conveyed to Mr. Manilal’s countrymen in India ... *that there is something in the labour conditions of Indians in Ceylon that the Ceylon government fears Mr. Manilal would expose*’ (*Ceylon Daily News*, 9 January 1922, emphasis added). Manilal, on his return to India, was involved in defending S. A.

Dange and other communists in the famous Kanpur conspiracy case. The Indian police reported that Manilal, deported from 'Fiji, New Zealand and Ceylon, and refused permission to practice in ... Madras and Bombay ... is deeply implicated in propaganda carried on more openly by others' (Jayawardena 1972: 340). The Ceylon police, which kept Natesa Aiyar under close surveillance, alleged in 1925 that he was still in contact with Manilal (Jayawardena 1972: 340).

THE CHARISMA OF GANDHI AND NEHRU

Among the spectacular political events in the plantation sector were the visits to the region by Mahatma Gandhi in November 1927 and Jawaharlal Nehru in 1931. By this time they were India's most renowned political leaders and had been imprisoned several times for passive resistance (*satyagraha*) and posing challenges to British rule. Between 1921 and 1923, the Indian National Congress launched a massive noncooperation campaign and *hartals* (mass stoppages), which included a boycott not only of the visit of the Prince of Wales but also of foreign goods, official functions and participation in the legislatures. It also included a refusal to pay taxes. Tensions increased when in January 1930, the Congress passed a resolution in favour of *purna swaraj* (complete independence). In March that year, Gandhi led the famous Salt March—which was joined by thousands of people—challenging British monopoly over the salt by marching 240 miles to the shore to gather it. Gandhi was arrested, triggering the large nonviolent civil disobedience movement, as a consequence of which over 80,000 people were jailed. The event led to worldwide publicity, and in 1930, Gandhi was named 'Man of the Year' by *Time* magazine.

It is therefore not surprising that the tours of Ceylon by Gandhi in 1927 and Nehru in 1931 were received by large crowds in Jaffna, Kandy, Colombo and elsewhere. Gandhi's speeches were mainly on Buddhism and Hinduism, against untouchability and alcoholism, and included an appeal for funds for a *khadi* (homespun cloth) campaign in opposition to buying manufactured cloth from England (Gandhi 2002). His visit invoked political enthusiasm among large sections of the Ceylon population, especially among plantation workers, whose reaction to his presence among them was charged with emotion. The urban workers also enthusiastically greeted Gandhi at a meeting organised by A. E. Goonesinha's Ceylon Labour Union and contributed funds to his campaign (Jayawardena 1972: 260).

When Gandhi visited Badulla, Nuwara Eliya and Hatton, he highlighted 'the lot of the Tamil labourers in the plantations in Ceylon', saying that he wished he had more time to 'see these simple folk in their homes' (Kadirgamar 2012: 34). Thousands of workers attended these meetings and Mahadev Desai, who had accompanied Gandhi, describing the crowds as 'trying to get a glimpse of Gandhiji above the vast sea of human heads surging before them' (see Kadirgamar 2012: 35).

C. Rajagopalachari, who also travelled with Gandhi, wrote that the Tamil plantation workers 'poured in ... to see Mahatmaji in their thousands and made many a hillside alive with men and women' (see Gandhi 2002: 208). When Gandhi went by train from Kandy to Badulla there were enthusiastic receptions by workers at Haputale and Bandarawela. For the meeting at Badulla, several estates in the district 'gave leave to the labour forces' to attend the event (Gandhi 2002a: 242). Writing about a meeting in Hatton for Gandhi, Desai writes that 'never in the history of Hatton' had such a large gathering been seen:

Almost on every estate in the district its work was stopped for the day ... It was with the greatest difficulty the car conveying Mahatmaji was able to pass ... People had collected at every point of vantage including the surrounding hills to catch a glimpse of the visitor (see Gandhi 2002a: 246).

Gandhi's spectacular reception among the plantation workers led to increased anti-colonial and nationalist feelings in this sector, which had become stronger than in any other section of the working class in Ceylon.

By the 1930s, the impact of Indian nationalism in Sri Lanka was marked; Indian nationalist leaders who had visited Ceylon included B. G. Tilak (1919), Sarojini Naidu (1924), Gandhi (1927), Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya (1931 and 1937) and Jawarharlal Nehru (1931 and 1939). Moreover, during the 1930s, many organisations with names such as Gandhi Sangham and Bose Sangham appeared in the plantations, and planters reported that off-duty workers in nearby towns could be seen wearing Congress caps. Pictures of Indian leaders such as Gandhi, Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose were also seen in the homes of workers.

In 1931, Nehru came on holiday to Ceylon with his wife Kamala and daughter Indira to recuperate from overwork and exhaustion. His month-long stay, of which two weeks were spent in Nuwara Eliya, although a private visit, inevitably attracted attention. In his autobiography, Nehru recalls the plantation workers who came to see him:

At Nuwara Eliya groups of labourers, tea-garden workers and others would come daily, walking many miles, bringing gracious gifts with them—wild flowers, vegetables, homemade butter. We could not, as a rule, even converse together; we merely looked at each other and smiled. Our little house was full of these precious gifts of theirs, which they had given out of their poverty, and we passed them on to the local hospital and orphanages (Gandhi 2002b: 5).

Nehru also commented in 1931 that the reduction of the minimum wage of plantation workers that had occurred that year was 'monstrous' and denounced the planters for being concerned only about their dividends (Jayawardena 1972: 351).

Nehru made several other trips to the island where he took up issues concerning plantation workers. An important visit was in July 1939 at a time when the plantation workers were being deprived of village franchise rights and Indian workers in Colombo were being repatriated as being 'non-Ceylonese'. Another significant occasion was his participation in the 1962 bi-lateral talks with the Ceylon government on Indian residents' citizenship.

TAMIL CONSCIOUSNESS AND ANTI-BRAHMIN AGITATION

By the 1930s growing feelings of a 'Tamil identity' also developed in addition to Indian consciousness and trade unionism. It was inspired by important developments in south India which influenced events in Sri Lanka. The most notable of these was the anti-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu. Its origins dated back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the spread of a Tamil and Dravidian consciousness.

The Self-Respect Movement, (*Suyamariyathai Iyakkam*), begun in 1925, was a product of anti-Brahmin agitation. It was founded by E.V. Ramasami Naickar, known popularly as *Periyar* (Great Elder). Born in 1879 to a merchant family, he violated many of the caste-based rules of social behaviour as a young man. He had joined the Indian National Congress but was revolted by the caste prejudices and social backwardness of the Madras Congress leaders. Periyar was involved in highlighting the social oppression and obscurantism of Tamil society while equally recognising the dangers of political reforms that would merely give power to the Brahmins. The movement 'drew attention to the social, ritual and cultural oppression of the masses of the ... non-Brahmin and lower castes' (Ram 1979: 393). In 1932, Periyar visited Ceylon, giving lectures

in Colombo, Kandy and Jaffna, where he spoke against religion, blind faith, Hindu gods and priests as well as against Brahmin domination and caste oppression.¹

Other influences on Indians in Sri Lanka included the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) movement of south India. While the Indian national movement and the Left and trade union movements were gaining in momentum, in the late 1930s and the 1940s, Periyar, as N. Ram has said, 'was able to plough his isolated furrow of the 'Non-Brahmin Movement' with the slogan of Tamilnad for the Tamilians, cut off from the broader all-India currents' (1979: 396). An attempt in 1938 to make Hindi compulsory in southern schools led to the demand for a separate state within the British empire called Dravida Nadu, composed of Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada speaking peoples. Periyar continued to oppose the freedom movement as merely an attempt to form a 'Brahmin Raj,' while C. N. Annadurai, leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) opposed the 'Aryan domination' of the Congress and also spoke out against foreign rule.²

In the 1930s and 1940s these movements attracted a mass following, raising important social concerns pertaining to Tamil culture and social reform. They also had an impact on Ceylon. Inspired by Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement in Madras, a Self-Respect Movement was started in Colombo, supported by groups who were part of the Tamil and Malayali working class of Colombo, including cooks, barbers, domestic labour, rickshaw men, hotel workers, grass cutters and bottle sellers. There was also some support in the plantations. In 1945, the movement became known the Ceylon Dravidian Federation; by 1948 it emerged as the DK, and in 1949 became the DMK, which held its first meetings in Kandy and Talawakelle, with A. Illancheriyar, a former hotel worker, as its Secretary (Interview with Illancheriyar by authors, Colombo, March 2001).

Clearly, the nationalist movement and the mass protests in India influenced the struggles of the Indian-origin labour in Ceylon and also

¹ The Self-Respect Movement, which attacked the ideological roots of Hinduism, took the movement to the masses. Brahmin Hinduism was described as the invention of a small clique, which needed 'the soil of ignorance, illiteracy, and exploitation of the masses to flourish.' There was a sharp atheist, populist tone to Periyar's agitation. Statues of gods were pelted with slippers, and Periyar himself attained fame if not notoriety for saying 'God does not exist. The inventor of God is a fool. The propagator of God is a scoundrel. The worshipper of God is a barbarian' (Ram 1979: 393).

² In 1949, a new party called the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was created as a breakaway from the Dravida Kazhagam (DK).

inspired other communities in the island. The visits of the iconic Indian politicians served to highlight the labour conditions of the plantation workers and publicise their lack of political rights in Ceylon. The social reform movement in India particularly focusing on inequalities of caste hierarchies also paved the way for greater social awareness in the plantation community. These political and cultural links with India were to continue in later years.

But while concerned British and Ceylonese bureaucrats and politicians sought to ameliorate the oppressive laws and poor living conditions on the estates in Ceylon, they did not question the nature and structure of plantation production nor what these implied for labour relations. The visits of the Indian nationalist leaders to Ceylon served to heighten workers' consciousness as 'Indians' and increased their support for the anti-colonial movement, while the Dravidian movement in south India made them aware of the need to fight the oppression of the Brahmin-dominated caste system.³ But these outsiders, with the possible exception of Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, did not seek to collectively mobilise the workers to struggle for their basic labour rights. The planters, for their part, sustained their own power by enforcing a harsh labour regime and keeping the workers in slave-like conditions on the estates. Furthermore, they managed, with the support of the state, to isolate the estate workers from wider working-class struggles through the use of trespass laws that that punished those who, without their approval, entered the estates from outside.

³ While Gandhi had taken up the cause of indentured labour in South Africa, and was no doubt aware of the vulnerability of plantation workers in Ceylon, he did not take this up as a major concern during his visit to the island.

Natesa Aiyar and the First Plantation Trade Union

The unskilled ignorant labourers who have been brought to these estates have had no idea of any concerted action for their betterment but the Planting Community by its organisations and financial strength have come to such an influential position that nothing was impossible for them. They recast any law they want at any time.

(K. Natesa Aiyar 1925: 9–11).

Up to the second decade of the twentieth century, the plantation workers were totally isolated and unrepresented in any political or other forum. The interests of plantation capital were, on the other hand, heavily represented in all spheres of government activity, including the legislature. But a major breakthrough in the stranglehold that the planters had on the workers came about with involvement of S. Kothandarama Natesa Aiyar (1887–1947) in the plantation labour struggles in Ceylon. A Tamil Brahmin by birth, he was a charismatic speaker and a political visionary who participated in the urban labour movement and was well experienced with fighting for the rights of workers. He had studied commerce, worked as a journalist and moved to Sri Lanka where he paid particular attention to the conditions of the Indian workers on the estates. He used his skill and knowledge to expose their ruthless exploitation and in 1931 formed the All Ceylon Indian Estate Labour Federation, a union, which under his leadership marked a historic breakthrough into this hitherto inaccessible sector in the country.

Using his skills and experience as a labour and political activist as well as his detailed knowledge of the working conditions on the estates, Natesa Aiyar used his compelling writings and exceptional capacity to mobilise the workers. His astute interventions in the legislature and labour movement, made the government and planters aware of the strength and

power of the workers in their struggle for their labour rights. He was also a visionary for his times; not only did he advocate the end of migration of plantation workers under such exploitative conditions but he also emphasised the need to provide higher wages to women as well as to ensure children's right to education.

K. NATESA AIYAR'S POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Natesa Aiyar's political background and history of labour activism gave him important insights into the exploitation of workers and were influential in initiating the trade union movement on the plantations. He had served as a minor government servant in Madras in India and moved to Ceylon in 1920 to edit the Tamil nationalist paper, *Thesa Nesan*, which was owned by M. A. Arulanandan and Dr E. V. Ratnam, executive members of the Ceylon National Congress. Natesa Aiyar subsequently also published the *Citizen* in English, whose editor was Lawrie Muttukrishna. Natesa Aiyar's links with local nationalists attracted the attention of the police. Moreover the police considered the *Citizen* a seditious journal for its criticism of the government and support of the Indian nationalists and its advocacy of complete independence for India and Ceylon (Jayawardena 1972: 337).

In his time Natesa Aiyar was considered a 'radical' by the authorities and police suspicions were increased by his connection with the Indian nationalist lawyer D. M. Manilal, who had been involved in agitation in Fiji and Mauritius on behalf of migrant Indian workers, and was also suspected of having links with communists. Natesa Aiyar organised protest meetings in Ceylon in connection with Manilal's deportation in 1922. He was also an active member of the urban Ceylon Labour Union, and between 1926 and 1928, worked closely with its Sinhalese leader, A.E. Goonesinha, who had been sympathetic to the plight of the plantation workers in the 1920s. Natesa Aiyar and Goonesinha jointly edited *Forward*, a journal in English, which advocated complete independence and attacked local leaders and also Mussolini (Jayawardena 1972: 341). Natesa Aiyar helped Goonesinha in the harbour strike of 1927, urging Indian workers in the harbour not to work. Both of them collected funds for the strikers from merchants. Nates Aiyar's experience with the urban trade union movement gave him greater awareness and insights into the potential of organising workers to gain their labour rights. The collaboration of Natesa Aiyar and A. E. Goonesinha marked the first time urban labour had tied up with the plantation sector. But this linkup did not last long. There was a



FIGURE 8.1

Natesa Aiyar.

Source: Muthiah (2003).

split between the two leaders in 1928 with Natesa Aiyar accusing Goonesinha of being anti-Indian.

It was during this period that the Ceylon government accepted the need for representation of Indian interests in Legislative Council. After the constitutional reforms of 1923, two members were appointed to the Ceylon Legislative Council to represent Indians. While this platform essentially served to give voice to Indian business interests in the country at first, it also provided an important political space for Natesa Aiyar to take up the concerns of the plantation workers when he was *elected* to the Legislative Council by a restricted electorate of Indian residents in Ceylon. He used this platform to highlight the deplorable conditions of work and life on the

estates. One of his most important pamphlets, *Under Planter Raj* (1925) was a scathing attack on the attempts by the Ceylon government and the planters to develop a 'standard wage' for the estate workers in the 1920s.

THE 'STANDARDISE WAGES' DEBATE

The conditions of work on the estates during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had not been a major concern for the colonial government, which favoured the planters and largely ignored the rights of the workers including the issue of a minimum wage. Arunachalam had raised the issue of a fair wage for the plantation workers in his campaigns (see Chapter 5). The government of Ceylon, however, chose not respond to this proposal, fearing the hostility that it would arouse among planting circles, and also because it could lead to the demand for a minimum wage for other workers. It was the Government of India that raised this issue in the 1920s, having taken the decision to examine the conditions of work of its nationals in all the colonies.¹ The Indian Emigration Act was passed in 1922, bringing the recruitment and migration of workers to other colonies under Indian government supervision. Recognising the high degree of indebtedness amongst these workers, the Act indicated, amongst other requirements, that all transport and subsistence costs en route were not to be deducted from the wages of the emigrant who could, within a year, return to India, if s/he had a valid reason to do so, and that the expenses involved would be borne by the recruiting agency.

The Emigration Act had important consequences for Ceylon. For the first time, the recruitment of estate workers was brought under Indian government purview and protection, which was a major change from the prevailing kangany system of recruitment that was viewed as the movement of 'free' labour and thereby required no government interference. The Act also expressly stated that the worker was to be given a free passage. The costs of recruitment could no longer be recovered from the workers' wages, going directly against the use of advances that had placed workers in debt to both kanganies and planters. In addition, workers who wished to leave could apply to the Indian Agent, who could meet the costs of the repatriation from funds provided by the Ceylon government and the Planters' Association. In response to the Indian Emigration Act, the Ceylon government passed the Indian Immigrant Labour Ordinance in 1923, which legally affirmed that the worker was not liable for the costs of transport, which, amongst other measures, provided

¹ This decision was influenced by increased agitation in India on the ways in which its workers were being treated. The 'slave-like' conditions on the tea estates in Assam had been highlighted by the Indian Association while other national leaders such as S. K. Gokhale, and the young Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi agitated against the unfair treatment of Indians in South Africa (Sarkar 1983).

for the appointment of a Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour (Kurian 1989: 126–31). At the same time, the Government of India pressured the Ceylon government to undertake an inquiry into the wages and cost of living of the Indian estate workers with the intention of 'standardising' their wages, for which purpose a committee was set up by the Ceylon government to report on the matter. During this period, K. Natesa Aiyar entered the Legislative Council, criticising the proposals made in the report of the committee that had investigated the matter.

The demands made by the Government of India were met with considerable indignation among the planters; references were made to the Government of India's 'interfering with the liberty of British subjects' and to its dictatorial powers (*Planters' Association Year Book* 1925: 16–17). But the Chairman of the Planters' Association cautioned the planters referring to the Indian government's 'absolute power to prevent emigration of labourers' while the Government of Ceylon advised the planters, that they were 'up against a very difficult question and must fall in with the views of India.' Moreover the Controller of Immigrant Labour said that India could ban emigration to Ceylon by a 'stroke of the pen' as the Governor-General in Council had this power and his advisers were part of the Emigration Committee of the Indian Legislative Council, on whose recommendation Indian emigration to Fiji, Mauritius and the West Indies had been stopped (*Planters' Association Yearbook* 1925). Insistence by the Indian government on the 'standard wage' and minimum wage legislation, accompanied by a threat of curtailing the emigration of Indian labour to Ceylon, finally led to a reluctant acceptance of the principle of minimum wage by the Ceylon government, in spite of the hostility to the proposal by the planters. A committee constituting seven members wrote a report on the relationship between the level of wages and the cost of living of estate workers.

'UNDER PLANTER RAJ'

It was in this context that Natesa Aiyar wrote the pamphlet *Under Planter Raj: The Standard Wage in Ceylon*, a stinging critique of committee report on the 'standard wage', stating that it was both biased and of an inadequate level.² Through the use of 'irrefutable facts and figures', he demonstrated the 'one-sidedness of the report' and showed clearly how

² According to the Committee the standard rate was the 'proper' rate for an able bodied men (16 years and older) and women (15 years and older) for a day's work or equivalent task (Aiyar 1925: 9).

the proposed standard wage was 'lower than the barest minimum of subsistence.' According to him, the very composition of the Committee, which included four planters, resulted in a report which was 'engineered, manipulated and brought out without the least regard for the interest of the 6 ½ lakhs of Indian labourers who are to be affected by it' and with 'no attempts ... to safeguard the interest of the voiceless Indian Labourers' (Natesa Aiyar 1925: 4-5).³

As part of the investigation on the standardisation of wages, the Indian Agent in Ceylon, Mr Renganathan, had drawn up a family expenditure budget for estate labour and come to the conclusion that 40 per cent of the Indian workers seemed to be unable to earn a living wage, saying 'ill health, inefficiency and low wages form a vicious circle.'⁴ But Natesa Aiyar disagreed with this estimation, saying that his study and calculations of the wages of the estate workers showed that just 15 per cent of the workers received sufficient pay (1925: 6). Furthermore, he argued that these low levels of pay were compounded by the late payment of wages, normally fifty days after the due date, as a result of which the 'the ignorant labourers do not generally know at what rate they are paid' (Natesa Aiyar 1925: 7). He condemned other practices that planters used to lower the cost of production, including late payment of wages and manipulating the check rolls, suggesting that a weekly payment would help the worker to know more about his earnings. He noted that the planters continued their practice of providing advances, even after tundu had officially been abolished, but had never attempted to actually increase wages to attract workers; instead, they had resorted to providing cash inducement, advancing loans, bonuses and even reducing the price of rice (Natesa Aiyar 1925:10).⁵ Such methods reflected the conscious

³ But he noted that the report had found that 'a fair percentage' of workers lived below the standard wage. Furthermore, it also demonstrated that the Government of Ceylon had 'accepted that the principle of supply and demand should not be allowed to sway the employer in his fixing up the wage, and that it should be legally standardized' (Natesa Aiyar 1925).

⁴ Report of the Agent of the Government of India 1926, p. 10 cited in Jayawardena 1972: 348.

⁵ Natesa Aiyar was also sceptical of the workability of the Repatriation Rules which allowed the worker to express his dissatisfaction or lack of fitness to undertake estate work to the Agent of the Government or to the District Medical Officer, indicating that this was 'too much' to expect from 'an ignorant labourer' (1925: 10). According to him, the workers continued to begin work on the estates in debt, as the allowance provided at the point of recruitment was usually spent on redeeming debts in India, 'misappropriated' by the recruiter or used up at the Mandapam camp on transit.

continuation by the planters of semi-feudal and bonded forms of labour relations on the plantations.

Natesa Aiyar's leftist orientation to wages was also clear in his reference to workers' labour power, as also in his critical approach to the planters' hostility to institutionalising a 'standard wage' since their preference was for wages to be determined by the supply and demand of labour:

... it must not be forgotten that labour power is a perishable commodity and its sale to some extent forced. The labourer must find immediate employment and cannot wait till he gets a demand; otherwise he will have to starve and die. In case he doesn't get employment at the rate he expects, he is necessarily forced to enter service under an employer for a lower rate lower than the actual cost of subsistence and in consequence he has to reduce his standard of living. This is exactly what has happened these 40 years in this Island (Natesa Aiyar 1925: 10).

Based on detailed calculations of the cost of living, taking into account the items necessary for subsistence as well as the number of days of work provided, Natesa Aiyar concluded that the workers required a much higher level of wages than the proposed standard wage for their 'mere existence' (1925: 12). He was unconvinced of the committee's assumption that as the employer was legally obliged to provide six days of work per week, this would actually be done in practice. While nothing prevented the workers from demanding this work, he was convinced that the law was, in effect, 'a dead letter' with 'no effect' (Natesa Aiyar 1925: 14). He also showed that there were increasing numbers of dependants in the country (children up to 9 years old and adults over sixty) who had to be taken care of by the workers, the extent of which was not taken into account by the committee.

It is an open secret that when the labourers find themselves unable to do work in the estates they always resort to begging in the neighbouring estate towns. That is the old age 'pension' the labourers are getting after several years of faithful service (1925: 15).

In pleading their cause, he noted

The labourers do not come to Ceylon to pass their days in poverty; just to pass off their days in meagre subsistence. There must be something for them to fall back upon. They should not be made a burden to their own kith and kin (1925: 20).

Finally, he concluded that the Government of Ceylon appeared to be in the main 'dictated by the Planting Community and it would not dare to do anything against their wish or interest' (1925: 22). In speaking of the workers, he noted that they

... are not organised and are helpless. They could not easily be approached by any outsider for fear of being charged for criminal trespass or for the troubles that may follow to anybody who entertained them. There is no public place where they can assemble in most of the Planting districts.

Natesa Aiyar was keenly aware of the problems of organising the plantation workers. Estates that were the most remote from the roads and Colombo were also associated with the lowest wages and poorest facilities, and there were few possibilities for escape for the workers as these estates also had watchers to prevent them from doing so (1925: 20).

To organise them and agitate for their rights especially against the well organised Planting community on the one side, the indifferent Indian community on the other and the Planter Driven Government on the third, is a thing impossible (1925: 23).

In the final analysis Natesa Aiyar proposed that, under these conditions, it was best to stop the emigration of these workers to Ceylon, indicating that the benefits of such an action would be more than what '100 years of agitation or negotiation' would be able to achieve (1925: 23). He was a forerunner in his thinking on this issue, which was subsequently taken up by the Ceylon Indian Congress in the 1930s with the Indian government placing a complete ban on emigration of Indian workers to Ceylon in 1939.

It should be noted that in Great Britain in the 1920s there had been mounting trade union activity, culminating in the famous and first General Strike of 1926 led by the British Trade Union Congress, which among other achievements, created awareness of the potential of the labour movement. It also led to the fear that revolutionary elements among the workers would take over the strike.⁶ Furthermore, the climate of change

⁶ In May 1926, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) called the strike of 1.7 million workers to support 800,000 miners who had gone on strike against wage reductions and increase in the hours of work, an action that was supported by several groups, including railway workers, printers, doctors and workers in the iron and steel industries. The Prime Minister of the day, Stanley Baldwin called it the 'road to anarchy.'

had come about in Great Britain as a result of the short-lived Labour government led by Ramsey MacDonald in 1924, who had visited Ceylon in 1926 and was hosted by the urban Ceylon Labour Union. Two members of the British Trade Union Congress went to India to study the prevailing labour conditions. One of them, A. A. Purcell, visited Ceylon in 1927 on the invitation of the urban labour leader, A. E. Goonesinghe, met members of the local labour movement and reported that they deserved all support from the British unions (Jayawardena 1972: 271–72). Natesa Aiyar, who was working with Goonesinghe during this period, was, no doubt, also exposed to these ideas. Such events were likely to have influenced the Ceylon government's policy on minimum wages. Both the Ceylon government and the planting interests were concerned at the possibility of the Indian government preventing the emigration of workers to the Ceylon plantations. At the same time, the government was aware of urban working-class unrest, especially after the General Strike in Ceylon in 1923. The government was also keen to contain potential labour unrest in the plantation sector, which had the largest section of the island's working class. Any agitation among plantation workers could threaten not just the stability on the plantations but also the economic stability of the colony as whole. It was in this context that the Minimum Wage Ordinance was formulated.

THE MINIMUM WAGE CONTROVERSY

As a result of these different pressures, the Ceylon government drafted the Minimum Wage (Indian Labour) Ordinance, which was sent in 1926 to the Planters' Association for comment. It was discussed by the planters at a stormy meeting in December 1926, at which their internal divisions over the minimum wage issue became evident. A resolution by a die-hard group of planters opposed the ordinance on the grounds that it was detrimental to both the employer and the employee.⁷ The idea of the minimum wage was condemned as 'a socialist ideal and a levelling up process' by a planter named Wilkins who said, 'Gentlemen, the house is well on fire, we have got to put it out.'⁸ American industrialist Henry Ford was quoted as saying that any attempt to fix a living wage was an insult to managers and workers. Planters argued that resistance should be shown to the threats of the Indian

⁷ *Planters' Association Yearbook*, 1926, Minutes of meeting of 15 December 1926 (cited in Jayawardena 1972: 349).

⁸ *Planters' Association Yearbook*, 1926: 145.

government.⁹ Wilkins argued that the minimum wage would cause labour indiscipline.¹⁰ Another planter, Sydney Smith said 'there would be no incentive for good work and it will bring ultimate ruin on the cooly.'¹¹ Two members of the Legislative Council, Major Oldfield and Thomas Villiers, expressed more moderate views, the latter arguing realistically that opposition to the legislation would go against planter interests and would also be 'a political mistake.'¹² The Minimum Wage Ordinance was passed in 1927, wages boards in the different planting districts were set up in 1928 and minimum wages came into effect in January 1929.

The raising of the minimum wages of estate labour, as depicted in Table 8.1 which came into force in January 1929, had the effect of raising the wages and improving the conditions of employment and wage payment among the workers.

TABLE 8.1: WAGES IN CENTS IN 1929

	Men	Women	Children
Low-country	50	40	30
Mid-country	52	41	31
Up-country	54	43	31

Source: *Ceylon Administration Reports for 1927: 23.*

But these benefits were short-lived, for by 1930, the tea and rubber industries were beginning to suffer from the effects of the economic depression. The fall in tea prices led to an immediate demand by planters for a reduction in the minimum wages paid to estate workers.¹³ At the same time, the planters continued to issue rice at the fixed price of Rs 6.40 a bushel while it was available in the open market in early 1931 for Rs 3 per bushel. This resulted in workers preferring to buy rice in the bazaar at less than half the price offered by the planters (*Ceylon Administration Reports* 1931: 32). After negotiations with the Government of India and

⁹ *Planters' Association Yearbook*, 1926: 145.

¹⁰ *Planters' Association Yearbook*, 1926: 149.

¹¹ *Planters' Association Yearbook*, 1926: 159.

¹² *Planters' Association Yearbook*, 1926.

¹³ In reality, however, the tea industry was to some extent protected by the International Tea Regulation Scheme under which major tea-producing countries such as India, Ceylon and the Netherlands East Indies agreed to adjust production so as to maintain favourable prices on the international market (Kurian 1989:151). Tea companies were on the whole marginally profitable between 1931 and 1933 (Ramachandran 1963: 54).

the planters, the Ceylon government reduced the minimum wage in May 1931. With the deterioration in the economic situation after 1931, there was a demand for further reductions in the minimum wage, which were implemented in 1932 and 1933. The changes in the minimum wages of male adult workers in the Up-country region are given in Table 8.2.

**TABLE 8.2: MINIMUM WAGE AND REDUCTIONS FOR MEN
(IN CENTS) IN PLANTING REGIONS**

	Up- country	Mid- country	Low- country
Minimum wage for men			
1929	54	52	50
May 1931	49	47	45
February 1932	49	43	41
May 1933	41	37	35

Source: Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour, *Ceylon Administrative Reports* for 1931, 1932, 1933.

The negotiations and the controversies around the minimum wage formed the immediate backdrop to the formation of the first trade union in the plantation sector.

THE ALL-CEYLON INDIAN ESTATE LABOUR FEDERATION

As discussed earlier, the election of Natesa Aiyar to the Legislative Council in 1924 and his condemnation of the methods used by the planters to control the workers highlighted the exploitative nature of plantation production. In the Council debates he demanded that the recruitment of workers for the estates be stopped until the owners had built sufficient 'coolie lines' and latrines, stating that the same conditions of the 1870s prevailed on contemporary estates (Legislative Council Debates, 24 February 1927). Thus, even by 1920s, plantation labour became potentially if not actually linked with 'seditious' and 'dangerous' activities associated with undermining British rule on the one hand and plantation capitalism on the other. By 1925, the police noted that Natesa Aiyar was writing 'highly seditious matter of a kind which is very rare in this Island', leading the Colonial Secretary to recommend that instead of prosecuting him 'the activities of this gentleman be watched' (Jayawardena 1972: 338). His concern with the plight of the plantation

workers resulted in visits to the plantations where he often dressed as a cloth merchant to overcome the trespass laws (Jayawardena 1972: 341). In 1931, Natesa Aiyar left the Ceylon Labour Union and formed the first trade union on the plantations, the All-Ceylon Indian Estate Labour Federation, which was in Hatton.

The formation of this union caused quite a stir among workers and planters. The workers regarded Natesa Aiyar as a fearless charismatic leader who was ready to oppose the powerful planter lobby. The new union took on the individual grievances of the workers and also organised mass meetings and publications in Tamil. For example, a meeting held in Hatton in 1931 to protest the reduction in wages drew 5,000 workers (Jayawardena 1972: 344). The union also encouraged workers to send petitions about their demands to the Agent of the Government of India and directly to the planters themselves. The main feature of Natesa Aiyar's union was its hostility to the kangany system, and he began a vigorous campaign against both the kanganies and the planters.

In turn, the planters organised a vicious campaign against Natesa Aiyar, using kanganies and the minor staff to denounce him as a Brahmin exploiter of the depressed communities. The planters also financed a Tamil paper, the *Oolian*, to vilify Natesa Aiyar and the union, urging that he be imprisoned (Jayawardena 1972: 346). The union was faced with an unprecedented economic depression in the early 1930s, which hit the tea and rubber sectors, leading to a cut in the minimum wage. Membership of the union declined but revived by the mid-1930s, claiming 37,000 members in 1940 and establishing more branches in Hatton, Badulla and Nuwara Eliya (Administration Report of the Controller of Labour 1944).

The controversy over the minimum wage issue during the 1920s had its impact on the plantations through pamphlets circulated by K. Natesa Aiyar. In the early 1930s there was also a sharp increase in the number of workers' petitions to the Indian Agent, focusing largely on breaches of the Minimum Wage Ordinance. This issue became a matter of heated controversy between the planters and the Controller of Labour on the one side, and the Minister of Labour, the Executive Committee for Labour and Natesa Aiyar's newly formed trade union on the other. For the first time, a major battle was fought on an issue vitally affecting the Indian workers who, until 1931, had been a voiceless element in the population.

After the elections for the State Council in 1931, Peri Sundaram, an Indian whose father was a prosperous head kangany on an estate, became Minister of Labour. A Cambridge graduate and a barrister, he had been an office bearer of the Ceylon Workers' Federation in 1920. The Executive Committee of Labour of the new legislature (State Council) in 1931

had not only an Indian from an estate background as minister, but its members also included I. X. Pereira (a businessman of Indian origin),¹⁴ the Indian-nominated member, S. P. Vytilingam, who had been elected by the estate voters in an up-country electorate, and A. E. Goonesinha, the labour leader of the urban workers. It is therefore not surprising that the Executive Committee for Labour rejected the proposal to cut the minimum wage, with only one member (J. C. Carey, the nominated European member) dissenting. The agitation against the reduction of minimum wages was reinforced by statements from the Indian Agent in Ceylon (K. P. S. Menon) and Jawaharlal Nehru, who was at that time paying a visit to Ceylon and said that talking of lowering wages was 'monstrous' (*Ceylon Daily News*, 14 July 1931, cited in Jayawardena 1972: 351).

In spite of this opposition, lowering of the minimum wage was sanctioned in December 1931 and May 1933 and came into force shortly thereafter.¹⁵ The closing down of estates due to the deepening economic crisis led to evasions of the provisions of the Minimum Wage Ordinance.¹⁶ It was only in 1934, after there was a clear improvement in the markets for tea and rubber that the wages were increased, first in January 1934 and then again in June 1934.¹⁷ But these increases also led to other forms of violations of the law on the part of the planters, including paying workers for piece work at rates that did not enable them to earn the minimum wage.¹⁸ There were also allegations made that the six days of work per week was 'practically never offered.'¹⁹ There were also instances reported of estates simply not paying the workers on the pretext that the work

¹⁴ Report of the Agent of the Government of India 1932: 13.

¹⁵ Report of the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour and Ceylon Administration Reports 1931 and 1933 (cited in Kurian 1989: 159–60).

¹⁶ The Agent of the Government of India reported that, on rubber estates, tappers were employed for six hours and only paid 75 per cent of the minimum wage, which involved a 25 per cent reduction in wages; he admitted that 'some measure of relief was urgently called for not merely in the interests of the labourers themselves who were threatened with unemployment.' In view of the critical position, the Executive Committee of Labour accepted the revised proposals of the Board of Indian Immigrant Labour, which included a reduction of the minimum wage and a provision for the question to be reconsidered after six months.

¹⁷ Report of the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour, *Ceylon Administration Reports* for the respective years (cited in Kurian 1989: 160–161).

¹⁸ Report of the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour for 1937, (F.C. Gimson), *Ceylon Administration Reports* for 1937: 43 (cited in Kurian 1989: 161).

¹⁹ Report of the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour for 1937, (F.C. Gimson), *Ceylon Administration Reports* for 1937: 43 (cited in Kurian 1989: 161).

was inadequate as well as sending them off from the field during work, alleging that their work was not satisfactory (Jayawardena 1972: 352).

Natesa Aiyar continued his political struggle for the labour rights of the estate workers at the level of the government. In 1936, under the second general elections held under universal franchise, he won the seat in the legislature (State Council) from a key plantation constituency, Hatton. He stated in 1940 that 95 per cent of the petitions he received were grievances against the head kangany and subordinate staff. The complaints included allegations that the head kangany was often the rice storekeeper and the shopkeeper; that he held weeding contracts and contracts to feed estate children; and that he gave good jobs to his relatives.²⁰

According to the Indian Estate Workers' Federation, it had, by 1940, a membership of 37,000 and branches in Hatton, Badulla and Nuwara Eliya.²¹ Membership was open to all Indian workers excluding head kangany and subordinate staff on the estates, and the direct goals of the Federation included 'bringing the employer and the labourer into closer touch' and the promotion of 'better understanding between the employer and the employee without the aid of the middleman.'²² The broad objectives of the union were 'economic progress, social uplift, moral elevation and cultural advancement of workmen.'²³ The economic policy included improving the standard of living and conditions of workers and the securing of permanency of employment and opportunities for promotion. The union also had the objects of educating workers on their 'duties, responsibilities, rights and liabilities' and to 'inculcate in the minds of the workmen a feeling of self-reliance.'²⁴

The use of pamphlets also became widespread after the growth of trade unionism in 1939. For example, the newly founded Estate Labour Federation sent petitions to the Governor and held mass protest meetings in the plantation areas condemning the reductions as 'unjust, uncalled-for and immoral.'²⁵ The Planters' Association complained in December 1939 that 'the distribution of subversive propaganda by means of pamphlets was another cause of immediate unrest.'²⁶

²⁰ Ceylon Indian Workers' Federation Constitution.

²¹ Administration Report of Controller of Labour, 1944.

²² Ceylon Indian Workers' Federation Constitution.

²³ Ceylon Indian Workers' Federation Constitution.

²⁴ Ceylon Indian Workers' Federation Constitution.

²⁵ Ceylon Labour Department, Report of resolution at meeting of Estate Labour Federation, 18 April 1933. File G. 176 (cited in Jayawardena 1972: 353).

²⁶ 25 *Planters' Association Yearbook*, 1939.

PROGRESSIVE POLITICIAN

In many ways, and certainly in his time, Natesa Aiyar was a progressive politician who was concerned with issues such as child labour and women's wages. In *Under Planter Raj*, he noted that there were movements in 'civilised countries' against employing children below ten years of age and suggested that it was important, therefore, that higher wages be given to adult men to maintain their family so that they would not have to depend on the earnings of their children (1925: 7–8). He was conscious that child labour would affect the educational achievements of the children, noting that by 'throwing greater responsibility on children in the support of the family the tendency for educating them is nowhere to be found.' (Natesa Aiyar 1925). In his opinion, it was, therefore, important for a 'decent margin' in male wages to meet the 'incidental expenses of the family life and the responsibility of supporting the non-working children and educating them.'

Natesa Aiyar was ahead of his time in supporting the improvement of women's wages:

[A] woman's earnings must be sufficient to support her on the standard given before marriage and be an additional support to the family after marriage. It may be argued that greater responsibility should be given to the womenfolk in the support of the family by proposing a higher rate of wages for them so that they may be able to support their children if they become widows. But this proposal to pay higher wages to women should not affect or reduce the man's responsibility and the capability to support the family (Natesa Aiyar 1925).

Equally inspiring was his use and recourse to cultural sources to bring about social change and promote workers' rights. He was, no doubt, influenced in these methods by his wife, Meenachhi Ammal, who was a poet and also supported his trade union activities (see Chapter 9). As K. Arunachalam, who assessed his work, wrote:

For Natesa Iyer, literature was not an activity to be indulged in during leisure time. His sole aim was to create an awareness among the plantation workers to make them rise up from their slumber. He adopted several strategies and tactics in his fight against the oppressors who deceived and exploited the working class. For him, arts and literature were tools in this struggle (Arunachalam quoted in Shanmugalingam 2010).

In many ways, and using different tactics and strategies, K. Natesa Aiyar demonstrated his commitment and ability to struggle for the rights of the Indian plantation workers in Ceylon. In spite of the powerful odds against him, he was successful in initiating the trade union movement on the plantations. He worked at this cause at several different levels: visiting and organising workers at the estate level, negotiating with the planters, and also taking up their cause in the legislature. His versatility and analytical ability in Tamil and English, his work with the Left and urban working-class movements and his broad vision of workers' emancipation made him an effective leader, an influential politician and formidable opponent in the labour struggles on the plantations.

Outsiders Demand Women's Rights

We went like Crusaders and answered the questions in an inspired manner ... I held a watching brief for such questions that we had not prepared. Lord Donoughmore asked if we wanted Indian and Tamil women labourers on the estates to have the vote. I replied 'Certainly, they are women too. We want all women to have the vote.

Agnes de Silva of the Women's Franchise Union,
writing of the invitation to give evidence before the Donoughmore
Commission (Minnette de Silva 1998: 32).

'Plantation Patriarchy', it has been argued, assimilated social hierarchies and gender biases stemming from colonialism, race, caste, ethnicity, religion and cultural practices into the structure of the labour regime and social organisation on plantations.¹ It justified and normalised the subordination of women workers; they were under male authority at all levels, worked longer hours and were paid less than their male counterparts, and they also undertook most of the (unpaid) household chores. Furthermore, they were, as discussed in Chapter 3, often subject to male violence and sexual abuse by their husbands, kanganies and even the planters. In many ways, women workers on the plantations could be viewed as 'slaves of slaves'.

They were however, ironically, depicted in nineteenth-century paintings and drawings by British artists as buxom lasses, smilingly plucking tea leaves—as the exotic 'other', a subject of the 'colonial gaze'. Such representations of tea pluckers in the colonial period were published in British weeklies such as the *Graphic*, and the *Illustrated London News* (see fig. 9.1). Similarly, a planter named Vereker Monteith Hamilton, who was

¹ See Kurian and Jayawardena 2013.

Source: R. K. de Silva (1998).

Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

paid employment. The early pioneers of women's employment outside the home were women doctors, teachers, nurses, secretaries and stenographers.

From the early decades of the twentieth century, women in Ceylon grew conscious of the need to oppose patriarchal traditions and practices and had, by the 1920s, organised to demand political rights for all women, including plantation women. They were no doubt influenced by the struggles of women for democratic rights in other parts of the world. The women who influenced the Ceylonese campaigners for women's rights included women from India and Britain who were part of the struggle in their countries against patriarchy in society and politics. Several of the most prominent suffragists of Britain had contact with their Ceylon counterparts. In 1929, one of the most famous British suffragists, Millicent Garrett Fawcett of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, visited Ceylon and spoke to the Women's Franchise Union (WFU) on 'Women's Place in Politics.' That year, another active WFU member Nellie Gunasekera, who spoke at the Women's Freedom League in London, was introduced to the audience by veteran campaigner for women's rights, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. The suffragists of Ceylon were also influenced by Margaret Cousins, the theosophist who had helped organise the Indian women's movement, and by Sarojini Naidu, the Indian nationalist and fighter for women's rights.

When demands for political rights for women arose in the 1920s, the media, with few exceptions, reflected strongly patriarchal values, ridiculing and even demonising these women. By the 1930s, however, women, partly influenced, perhaps, by increased literacy, began to challenge patriarchal traditions in the family, often ignoring them and marrying across caste and ethnic barriers (Jayawardena 1986). The most glaring example was however the patriarchal control in politics, with representation in the legislature remaining at around 5–6 per cent for women in the legislature since 1931 up to the early twenty-first century.

PROTESTS AGAINST THE EXPLOITATION OF PLANTATION WOMEN WORKERS

The economic exploitation, social discrimination and political exclusion on plantations were known to those women in urban areas who were actively fighting for women's rights and challenging patriarchy. Such concerned women were among the outsiders who began to speak up for plantation women workers and their rights from the early twentieth century onward. They included the wives of leading political agitators and

workers' champions—D. M. Manilal, K. Natesar Aiyar, Satyavagisvara Aiyar and George E. de Silva. These male leaders, while concerned about plantation labour as a whole, had also supported women's rights and denounced their exploitation.

These sentiments were echoed by male poets in India, such as Bharati, who wrote on women's misery on Fijian plantations, which 'reverberated in the tea gardens' of Ceylon (Shanmugalingam 2010: 15). A Ceylonese writer, Anthony Jeeva, writes that Bharati's poems were 'not only heard on nationalist platforms in India but also ... motivated the upcountry people' (Shanmugalingam 2010: 15). S. Viruthasalam (1906–49), who wrote under the pen name Puthumaippithan was another inspirational Tamil writer from India who wrote in the 1930s of the degrading life of plantation workers in Sri Lanka His novel *Thunpa Keni* (The Pond of Agony) was a drama of two locations and described

The lives of the past generation of Malaiyaka [upcountry] plantation workers, their struggles for life, their lamentations of despair plus the atrocities committed by the landlords of their places of origin [in India] and the estate officials at the place to which they came for work [Ceylon]. (K. Arunachalam, quoted in Shanmugalingam 2010: 16).

THE MILITANCY OF JAYUNKVAR MANILAL

While Manilal is a more or less forgotten figure in both India and Sri Lanka, his wife, who is even less known, played a significant role in the struggles of that time. Manilal's wife was Jayunkvar Mehta, the daughter of Dr Pranjivan Mehta, who resided in London and used to look after Indians on their arrival there. Dr Mehta, a fellow Gujarati, was one of Mahatma Gandhi's first mentors in London and became a lifelong friend; when Gandhi first arrived there as a student in 1888, he carried a note of introduction to Dr P. J. Mehta who met him at the Victoria Hotel.²

² Gandhi spoke of his initiation to London society—

He gave me a hearty greeting. He smiled at my being in flannels ... and he humorously initiated me. 'Do not touch other people's things' he said. 'Do not ask questions as we usually do in India on first acquaintance, do not talk loudly, never address people as "Sir" whilst speaking to them as we do in India, only servants and subordinates address their masters that way.' And so on and so forth. He also told me that it was very expensive to live in a hotel and recommended that I should live with a private family.

On Gandhi's advice the Manilals moved to Mauritius and worked for Indian plantation workers, but were deported and moved to Fiji where they led a militant strike of Indian plantation workers. In a report on the unrest in March 1920, the Governor of Fiji commented on the role of Indian women in urging workers to strike, the 'most prominent among them being Jayunkvar Manilal, who addressed meetings of Indians, exhorting them not to go back to work and to prevent all their countrymen from doing so.' He further alleged that 'bands of women of the lowest classes were organized to intimidate workers with obscene language and filthy practices.' The Governor issued an order expelling D. M. Manilal and Jayunkvar from Fiji; they were deported successively from New Zealand, Australia and Singapore, arriving in Sri Lanka in 1921 (Napal 1963).

Jayunkvar Manilal's leadership of working-class struggles and participation in satyagraha with Gandhi influenced some women in Sri Lanka notably Meenachi Ammal, Lilamani Muttukrishna and Nalamma Satyavagiswara Aiyar. It is significant that at the meeting to protest Manilal's deportation, Lilamani Muttukrishna, an Indian from Pune, spoke eloquently on behalf of Indian women in Ceylon, and referred to Jayunkvar Manilal, as 'a dear friend' and 'patriotic daughter of India', who had ungrudgingly worked 'for the relief of suffering' in Fiji and the other countries she had lived in. She also praised the women of India who had resolved to struggle, 'whatever the consequences ... with their husbands and brothers to make their land fit to be free' (*Ceylon Daily News*, 9 January 1922). Lilamani was the wife of Lawrie Muttukrishna, a Colombo Chetty Christian, who pioneered secretarial studies in Colombo and had started a polytechnic school.

MEENACHI AMMAL AND WORKERS'/WOMEN'S RIGHTS

One of the most powerful political figures in plantation politics was Meenachi Ammal (see fig. 9.2), who is referred to as the first woman to publicly take up the cause of the plantations in Ceylon (M. Chitraleka 1991: 67). She was of Indian origin but her father, who was a poet, lived in Matale, a town that bordered the plantation region. Her mother was a schoolteacher. From her youth, therefore, she was familiar with Tamil literary traditions. She was the wife of the trade unionist K. Natesa Aiyar and had worked closely with him in organising the union and 'infusing a political awareness among the plantation workers' (Chitraleka 1991: 67). Like her husband, Meenachi Ammal originated from Thanjavur, and in

the 1920s and 1930s, she wrote songs on the exploitation of women on the plantations and the political and economic grievances of plantation workers. She spoke and sang on public occasions to large crowds of workers and edited from 1928 onward, the journal *Desabhaktan* with her husband Natesa Aiyar. After the union was set up in 1931, she 'displayed great zeal in enrolling members' urging them 'to unite in the fight against oppression.' The 'main motif of her songs was the need for Indians to 'write and fight for their rights' while her songs were 'illuminated by her commitment and enthusiasm' (Chitraleka 1991: 71). Meenachi Ammal's collection of nine songs was published under the title *The Conditions of the Indian's Life in Sri Lanka* in 1940. In the foreword she wrote:

The situation of the Indians living in Sri Lanka is progressively deteriorating. The time has come for the people of India living in Sri Lanka to unitedly carry forward a relentless fight to establish their rights ... If such propaganda is carried out through songs, it will be more fruitful. That is why, today, I have ventured to expose the position of the Indians living in Sri Lanka through song. In order to make the Indians fight relentlessly to establish their rights without falling prey to lethargy and passivity, it is my desire that these songs will motivate them (quoted in Chitraleka 1991: 71).

The issue of women's franchise led to spirited debate on universal suffrage. A Tamil woman writer who supported the cause of women's franchise was Mangalammal Masilamani, a journalist, who founded the *Tamil Mahal* (Tamil Woman) in 1923. Meenachchi Ammal also raised questions on the issue of voting rights for plantation workers. She joined the Women's Franchise Union, formed in Colombo in 1927, which included wives of prominent politicians and women professionals, including Sinhalese, Tamil, Burgher and Colombo Chetty middle-class activists. On the franchise, Meenachi critiqued national figure Sir P. Ramanathan, a die-hard patriarch, who had not only opposed women's franchise, but even denounced voting rights for Sri Lankan women as casting pearls before swine (de Alwis and Jayawardena 2001). In reply, Meenachi commented, 'Ceylon has been considered more advanced than India. But if people say that voting rights should not be given to women, how could it be considered advanced?' (*Desabhaktan*, 13 April 1928). Meenachi Ammal was also critical of the urban-based Women's Franchise Union for charging an annual membership fee of Rs 50 and also not catering 'to those sisters' who did not speak English:



FIGURE 9.2
Meenachi Ammal.

Source: Women's Education and Research Centre, Colombo.

This union has to achieve more in the coming years. The annual subscription ... is not affordable for a person with an average income. It is not enough that only the rich participate in the activities of the Union, it is time for everyone to contribute towards the women's franchise campaign. And it is high time to begin propaganda among those sisters who were not educated in English (*Desabhaktan*, 26 January 1929, quoted in de Alwis and Jayawardena 2001: 58).

AGNES DE SILVA AND VOTING RIGHTS

When the question of the plantation women's voting rights came up and Agnes de Silva, a delegate of the Women's Franchise Union, was asked

by the Labour Party MP Drummond Shiels (one of the Donoughmore commissioners on constitutional reform) whether female franchise should be extended to plantation women, she famously replied 'Certainly, they are women too. We want all women to have the vote' (de Silva 1998: 32). After the granting of universal suffrage, women and men on plantations voted for the first time in the general election of 1931.

Agnes de Silva, née Nell, was a member of the Burgher community (of Dutch descent) who married lawyer and nationalist politician George E. de Silva. He had a record of confrontational radical politics in the 1920s, belonging for a period to A. E. Goonesinha's Ceylon Labour Party and hosting Gandhi, Nehru and the British Labour leader Ramsay McDonald on their visits to Kandy. Agnes and George de Silva were among the few non-Tamil Sri Lankans of the time to champion the rights of plantation workers. Agnes de Silva was influenced by the best known woman Indian nationalist Sarojini Naidu, who stayed with the de Silva's in 1927 and had long discussions with Agnes on women's rights issues in India and elsewhere (Russell 1981: 43; de Alwis and Jayawardena 2001: 34). In 1928, Agnes and George de Silva were part of a Ceylon Labour Party delegation to London where they met trade union and labour leaders (Minnette de Silva 1998). There, Agnes was inspired by the British women's struggles for equal rights and met several activists who had participated in the women's suffrage struggles. In fact, when Agnes de Silva unsuccessfully contested the Galagedera seat in the legislature in 1933 as a Ceylon Labour Party candidate, she obtained the plantation workers' votes, since she and her husband had earlier campaigned for their rights.

THE SUFFRAGIST NALAMMA MURUGESU

Another activist-cum-professional in the cause of women was Nalamma Murugesu, wife of trade union leader Satyavagisvara Aiyar. Educated in Jaffna, she studied medicine in Madras from 1904 and obtained further qualifications in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dublin, returning to Sri Lanka in 1911 (de Alwis and Jayawardena 2001: 88). Influenced by suffragist agitation which was at its height in Britain around 1911 to 1913, she became involved in Sri Lankan politics and women's issues. Nalamma joined the Ceylon National Congress and in 1919 was successful in getting a resolution passed on franchise rights for women.

By 1927, she was one of the secretaries of the Women's Franchise Union, and spoke out forcefully on women's franchise, asking the men

who opposed it whether they would like to see local women 'go about smashing windows and breaking chairs' as the suffragists did in Britain. She critiqued Sir Ramanathan who opposed universal suffrage, saying he 'was evidently a jealous husband' who thought 'the purity ... and modesty of womankind would be marred if they were given the franchise' (de Alwis and Jayawardena 2001: 21). Her links to plantation issues were established after her marriage to Satyavagiswara Aiyar and she devoted much of her time to the grievances of plantation workers.

KAMALADEVI RAISES A STORM

In the 1930s, Indian political activist Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903–1988) was an important outside influence on men and women in the plantation sector as well as in Jaffna and Colombo. Born in Mangalore, Kamaladevi studied in Madras where she not only joined the nationalist movement but also the women's rights struggles, influenced by her friendship with theosophist Margaret Cousins. In 1917, she visited London and studied sociology at Bedford College. Through her marriage to the Bengali poet and political figure, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, she came into contact with his sister Sarojini Naidu, a leader of the Indian National Congress at that time.

In 1930s Kamaladevi visited Ceylon and made a tremendous impact at the annual sessions of the Youth Congress in Jaffna. This was a political organisation led by Handy Perimbanayagam and other young intellectuals and activists, based on non-sectarian nationalism, secularism and independence for the country. Kamaladevi presided at the sessions and as Kadirgamar writes, she was 'young, attractive and eloquent and took the Youth Congress by storm' (2012: 92). In her speech, Kamaladevi, who was a member of the Indian National Congress Socialist group (led by Jai Prakash Narayan) made an economic analysis of imperialism and called upon the youth to revolt against British rule stating that 'no radical ... achievement is possible as long as the Britisher waves his flag over the country', warning the audience that 'the grant of each new set of reforms ... is one more gag on your rising spirit' (Kadirgamar 2012: 84–85). Her stirring speech had a strong impact among all present and especially on the women who had attended the meeting in large numbers (personal communication, Selvy Tiruchandran, 20 June 2013).

Kamaladevi visited Sri Lanka again in March and April 1937 and this time her impact was on the plantations, where as a Tamil speaker, she roused the workers, denouncing their exploitation and oppression in

strong terms. She had been invited to the country by the newly formed Left party—the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP)—which had begun to unionise the plantation workers. The LSSP considered the Congress Socialist Party ‘a fraternal party’ and in 1936 sent a delegation to the Faizpur session of the Indian National Congress (Amarasinghe 2000: 24–25). As an ‘outsider’ from India and a Tamil-speaking socialist, she attracted the attention of the local police and this time too she ‘raised a storm.’

Kamaladevi’s visit coincided with the police authorities’ concern over the presence in the island of M. A. Bracegirdle, a British supporter of the LSSP who highlighted the conditions of workers on plantations (see Chapter 10). As Ranjith Amarasinghe noted, the colonial government feared the ‘strengthening of the ties between Indian and Sri Lankan radicals’ and ‘fully covered’ Kamaladevi’s visit. A police report on a rally in Nawalapitiya where she spoke was also addressed by Bracegirdle who made a fiery speech ‘which the police and planters thought was particularly anti-British and threatening and inciting in nature.’ The participation of Bracegirdle on ‘the same platform as the Samasamajists and an Indian agitator ... was sufficient to infuriate the planter establishment’ (Amarasinghe 2000: 24–25).

Kamaladevi, who was profoundly moved by the situation of women plantation workers, also wrote a foreword in later years to a novel entitled *Refuge* by Gopalkrishna Gandhi, set in a tea plantation, depicting the life of a worker Valliamma and contrasting her exploitation to the lives of planters. Thus, in more ways than one, Kamaladevi’s role as an ‘outsider’ exposing the conditions on plantations was an important input into raising consciousness on this issue.

In contrast to the male outsiders who wrote about the grievances of the plantation workers, the female outsiders took up the issue of patriarchy and women’s rights, paying attention to the importance of women’s participation on an equal basis in politics. These women outsiders did not hesitate to confront even the most distinguished of male politicians who were opposed to women’s equality and included plantation women’s franchise as part of their demands for social and political change. In these ways, pioneering women activists crossed the traditional barriers of caste, class and ethnicity and expressed their solidarity with women from all levels of society.

The Left takes on the 'Planter Raj'

You see those white hills there, those white bungalows, where the whites live in luxury ... they suck your blood, they are parasites.

Mark Anthony Bracegirdle

(Bracegirdle Commission Report, Sessional Paper 18 of 1938).

The role of the 'outsider' has been a point of theorisation in politics and labour history, with Marxists emphasising the potential of such persons to provide leadership to the working class. Lenin argued that the workers only had a 'trade-union consciousness' on economic issues of wages and conditions but needed the 'political consciousness', which is brought to the workers from outside in order to politicise and give strong leadership to the movement. In 1902, in his classic work *What Is To Be Done?* he laid down the line on trade union consciousness and political leadership:

We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation...
(Lenin 1902).

The experience of colonialism brought into discussion the economic and social deprivations suffered by workers and the limitations they posed to the workers in challenging the exploitation they experienced. The Indian labour historian, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, noted that workers under colonialism suffered from poor literacy due to the government's

low investment on social overheads, which in turn, 'blocked articulation of labour demands or rise of spokesmen from the ranks of labouring classes' (2006: 148). As a result, the intelligentsia (educated urban professionals) became the 'surrogate leaders and spokesmen' and this 'outsider' leadership, was the 'characteristic feature of colonial South Asia' (Bhattacharya 2006).¹ Amiya Bagchi also recorded that many of these 'outsider leaders' were 'damned' by the authorities as 'conspirators against the state—in order to demonize them and curb the militancy of the workers' (Bagchi 2002: 216).² A leading Left politician in Ceylon, N. M. Perera, who was also a trade-union leader, spoke of the added difficulties of running a trade union in a colonial context where 'everything is done in English', arguing that it 'it is only the outsiders' who can help the workers and their trade unions (Kearney 1971: 43).

LABOUR AND ANTI-COLONIAL PROTESTS

The 1920s was a period of labour unrest in Colombo with the General Strike in 1923 bringing the city to a standstill. Trade unions had also been established in key sectors of the colonial economy, with workers from the railways, the harbour, factories and the tramways, among others, demanding higher wages and better conditions of work. These urban workers belonged to the Ceylon Labour Union, whose leader A. E. Goonesinha worked closely with Indian journalist Natesa Aiyar, the founder of the first union on the plantations. The colonial state was seriously concerned about the potential power of the organised workers, particularly as strike action had also resulted in militancy and violence. During the Tramways strike of 1929, for instance, the workers set fire to

¹ Bhattacharya has suggested that these 'outsiders' were also important in the development of the initial 'discourse of labour history in South Asia' where they represented the cause of the workers, 'assuming an adversarial role as advocates on their behalf in labour's struggle against capital and the colonial state' (2006: 148).

² On a similar vein, De Haan and Sen noted that that Bengali educated middle class was the 'almost natural candidate' to take up their cause of workers in the Jute industry in Bengal during colonialism where owners (British or Marwari from Western India) and the workforce were largely migrants from other parts of India (De Haan and Sen 2005). Countering this viewpoint and stressing the agency of the workers was the emphasis in Dilip Simeon's analysis of the labour movement in Chota Nagpur in the 1920s and 1930s which demonstrated that while workers invited leaders from outside to lead them they were capable of removing them when they found them unacceptable (2001).

the Maradana Police station in Colombo and the police responded with bullets, killing five persons. In taking such action, the urban workers and their organisations threatened not only the stability of the country but also its financial basis, as many of the industries, including the plantations, were dependent for their production and profitability on the transport of goods and services. Commenting on these actions in the later years, Philip Gunawardena of the LSSP noted that 'the workers rose to an extraordinary pitch of revolutionary energy, enthusiasm and sacrifice ... to defend their class interests' (*Searchlight*, 9 September 1931).

The colonial government, keen to contain the labour unrest in Colombo and worried that it might spread to other parts of the island, agreed to a collective agreement with the unions in 1929. It was the first of its kind in Ceylon and laid down rules and regulations to govern trade union negotiations and strike action. While this agreement could be viewed as a progressive step towards improving the labour rights of the workers, the labour leader, A. E. Goonesinha was later criticised by the LSSP for having compromised the labour struggles by accepting the agreement and thereby countering the revolutionary potential of the workers. In addition, his anti-Indian position, which became evident by the early 1930s, caused the LSSP to decry his chauvinistic and communalistic views.

By the 1930s, Ceylon had witnessed increasing protests by young Marxists and radical nationalists who decried colonialism and formed Youth Leagues in Colombo and Jaffna. The South Colombo Youth League led an anti-Poppy Day campaign on Armistice Day (11 November) in 1933 to protest against money being collected for veteran British soldiers. In its place, they organized the *Suriya Mal* campaign (selling a yellow flower as opposed to the red poppy) to express their anti-imperialist sentiments and collect funds for local causes (Goonewardena 1960: 3). The Youth Leagues also worked in rural areas during the malaria epidemic of 1933–34, and in 1933 had formed a trade union which led a long strike at the Wellawatte Spinning and Weaving Mills in Colombo. In the period 1931–35 they also had a member in the State Council, Dr S. A. Wickremasinghe, who spoke out against conservative local politicians, attacked British colonial policies, and exposed areas of exploitation and oppression of workers and peasants.

THE LSSP AND PLANTATION UNIONS

The first Left Party in Ceylon, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), formed in 1935, took up the cause of the plantation workers, denouncing

their labour exploitation and calling for radical change. It was composed of radical men and women who had been active in opposing colonial rule, as well as some Marxist-influenced youth who had returned after completing their studies in Britain and the USA (Amarasinghe 2000; Ervin 2006). It was only to be expected that these Leftists would be concerned with the plantation workers and their mandate went beyond economic demands and included political revolution.

One of the founder members of the LSSP, Philip Gunawardena, a Marxist, had attended university in Madison, Wisconsin in the 1920s and later lived in London and Berlin before returning to Ceylon. He was the earliest Leftist to raise the issue of plantation labour. In an article written in 1931 entitled 'Whither Ceylon?' he spoke of the potential unrest among plantation workers, denouncing the Minimum Wage Ordinance of 1927 as an attempt 'to control Indian labour with a view to prevent the possibility of strikes.' Gunawardena commented on the lack of organisation among plantation workers, alleging that the kanganies were slave drivers for the planters and that the trespass laws prevented outsiders visiting the estates. He noted, however, that 'the restlessness of the town is spreading into the estates and riots are becoming frequent' and drew attention to an important riot on Marlborough Estate. The District Judge referred to this agitation as a 'serious case', and warned that rioting in a district 'bristling with estates heavily staffed with coolies, could have serious consequences', urging that unless it was immediately dealt with it would be 'impossible to keep law and order.' Gunawardena called this 'a very significant comment on the supposed docility of the Indian coolie' (*Searchlight*, 9 September 1931).

The ideology of the LSSP included components of national liberation and socialism, as reflected in the first party programme of 1935. Their demands included 'complete national independence, nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, abolition of inequalities based on race, caste, creed or sex' (Goonewardena 1960: 4). The LSSP had frequently stressed the fact that the centre of capitalism in the country was the plantation sector of the economy, and in contrast to the urban labour leadership of the 1920s, which chose to ignore the plantation workers, the LSSP recognised the importance of class action in the plantations. The most significant contribution of the LSSP in the mid-1930s was the propagation of Left ideologies and its strategies of urban unionisation and the introduction of militant action into the plantations. It supported the involvement of foreign outsiders who highlighted the conditions of the estates. For example, at the invitation of the LSSP, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, a leader of the socialist wing of the Indian

National Congress, visited the island in 1937 and made contact with the estate workers in the course of her tour.³ As noted previously, speaking in Tamil, Kamaladevi attracted crowds of estate workers to her meetings in the plantation districts thereby drawing the attention of the police (see Chapter 9).

The LSSP's slogan of working class solidarity and socialism was taken up by many plantation workers, especially those who had benefitted from the basic education provided for the children of plantations with the enactment of the Education Ordinance of 1920 (see Chapter 5). Having some exposure to even rudimentary skills in reading, writing and arithmetic gave the workers the ability to challenge the abuse and corruption of the kanganies and the planters, with many of them joining the first trade union on the plantations in 1931 under Natesa Aiyar. Education, however basic and of relatively poor quality, laid the basis for increased class consciousness and political awareness in the Planter Raj, with workers becoming receptive to the trade union and socialist agenda of the LSSP.

By 1939 the LSSP was active among plantation workers and at its annual conference that year, passed a resolution urging the immediate increase of the minimum wages of these workers by 33 per cent and the abolition of the system of discharge certificates and pence money (paid by planters to kanganies). The LSSP formed the All-Ceylon Estate Workers' Union in October 1939, with Vernon Gunasekera and P. M. Veluchamy as its secretaries and S. N. Ponniah as President. In December 1939, the union claimed a membership of 8,000. Although this LSSP trade union was the smallest of the estate trade unions in terms of membership, it succeeded in introducing militant trade unionism to the estates; a reflection of the ideology of the leaders of the LSSP, who regarded the planters as the embodiment of both imperialist and capitalist interests in Ceylon.

M. A. BRACEGIRDLE—'A FOREIGN OUTSIDER'

The 'Bracegirdle incident' brought the LSSP to the fore as a participant in plantation trade unionism, and also created the biggest political storm of its time, raising important constitutional issues in its wake.

³ The LSSP was in contact with the Congress Socialist Party in India and also attended the Faizpur session of the Indian National Congress in 1936 (Goonewardena 1960: 70).

It resulted in a wave of popularity and publicity for the LSSP and, for the first time, linked the Left in Ceylon with issues connected with the plantations. Class consciousness thus entered the plantation sector in a dramatic way, not only through the Left but also through Leftist foreigners, such as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Mark Antony Bracegirdle.

Bracegirdle, born in Britain in 1913, emigrated to Australia in 1936 and came to Ceylon as a trainee planter on Relugas tea estate. In Australia he had been an active member of the Sydney Communist League. After his arrival in Ceylon, he interested himself in conditions of labour on the estates and joined the LSSP, writing in its journal under an assumed name. Dismissing Bracegirdle from the estate, the superintendent reported him to the acting Inspector-General of Police (IGP) stating that due to Bracegirdle's agitation the workers had 'started to give trouble', adding that 'there was general slackness ... and the pruners were impertinent and would not work.' The superintendent dismissed five workers, resulting in about fifty or sixty others also leaving the estate. This was attributed to the 'disaffection which Bracegirdle had stirred up'.⁴

Bracegirdle began to appear at public meetings in the estate sector organised by the LSSP. Being an ex-planter, his militant speeches against planters and British rule attracted large crowds. He was also a prominent speaker at the mass meetings that were held during Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's visit to the island. The police reported him as saying

I know the secrets of the planters ... I came here as I heard it was a rich country ... but all the riches have gone to the pockets of the white men. Do you know what amount he pays to the club as his drink bill, it is enough to keep a hundred families out of starvation. (*Bracegirdle Commission Report*, Sessional Paper 18 of 1938).

For a non-Ceylonese to be linked with the LSSP and to be actively engaged in such propaganda led to alarm in official circles. In a confidential report, the acting Inspector-General of Police said that it was 'dangerous to allow a European youth of this type to remain in Ceylon stirring up feelings of disaffection against employers of labour and against the British Government' and recommended that he be deported.⁵ The Governor, Edward Reginald Stubbs, reported to the Secretary of State that Bracegirdle

⁴ (SLNA File CF 131/37).

⁵ SLNA File CF/137/37, Report of Acting IGP.

went about the country making violent speeches abusing Europeans and inciting labour to rise against planters. As ignorant coolies tend still to attach importance to speeches of white men, the police and I have considered him a public danger.⁶

The policy of the government had always been that foreign communists and 'agitators' were a greater menace than their local counterparts and deportation and restrictions on them landing in the island had sometimes been carried out on these grounds. The Governor confirmed this attitude when he wrote to the Secretary of State that 'even if we can afford to disregard the activities of local communists, it is obviously dangerous to allow them to be reinforced by external agitators.'⁷ Other evidence of this attitude is seen from a statement from A. E. Goonesinha, a Colombo labour leader from the 1920s, who claimed that the Governor, speaking of Bracegirdle, said: 'I do not mind the whole of Ceylon turning Communist but I do not want Europeans to come and meddle here.' Goonesinha added that the British administration believed that Bracegirdle was seriously compromising 'the prestige of the white man' (*Hansard* 1938: 4053).

The LSSP leader N. M. Perera, comparing the Bracegirdle episode to the Meerut Trial in India (where three British communists were tried for conspiracy along with local communists), said that it was an 'outstanding example that so long as the natives, the black people, take part in an agitation there is no great objection, but the moment Europeans come on the scene, the position is changed' (*Hansard* 1938: 4673). Another LSSP leader, Colvin R. de Silva observed in later years that 'Bracegirdle had broken no law except the unwritten law of colonialism, that the whites do not join the coloured but stand together against them' (*Samasamajist*, 8 January 1953). One of the Governor's advisers in the Civil Service held that though the activities of the LSSP did not constitute 'an immediate threat to public security', the activities of a European, who had been a planter 'inciting estate labourers and others to down tools does constitute a real danger of unrest leading to breaches of the peace and might well endanger the economic stability of the island.'⁸

Under an old Order in Council of 1896, the Governor issued a deportation order on Bracegirdle without consulting the Board of Ministers or the State Council, which was the elected legislature. This caused a serious constitutional crisis. Helped by the LSSP, Bracegirdle

⁶ Ibid. Confidential Telegramme 95, of 12 May 1937.

⁷ Ibid. Confidential Despatches of Governor 15 May 1937.

⁸ (SLNA File 131/37, May 1937).

went into hiding and the party launched a campaign against the action of the government. Writing to the Chief Justice, Bracegirdle protested against the 'gross interference with the rights of a British subject', and added that he had as much right to be in Ceylon 'as the Governor or any one of his lesser paid officials' in a statement to the press (*Times of Ceylon*, 5 May 1937). In the same statement, he facetiously declared 'I am not leaving Ceylon until I am thrown out ... perhaps the Governor will have to carry me out on his shoulders under the proclamation of 1896 ... that will be better than a state drive'.

The LSSP was able to raise the issue of constitutional liberties, and thereby gain the support of all the ministers, and the great majority of the state councillors, as well as arouse popular support all over the country. The President of the LSSP, Colvin R. de Silva, stated that the real question was 'the undermining and the denial of the liberty of the subject in Ceylon ... for the sole bulwark of liberty is the recourse to the ordinary courts of the land' (*Ceylon Daily News*, 24 April 1937, Letter to Editor). The *Ceylon Daily News* agreed on this issue, and stated that 'the existence of this kind of legislation ... is a continuing menace to the ordinary rights of British citizenship' (*Daily News*, 24 April 1937, Editorial).

At a mass meeting held on 5 May 1937 at the Galle Face green, Bracegirdle, whom the police were trying to arrest, made a dramatic appearance and spoke to a vast crowd, which, according to the LSSP, was 'delirious with enthusiasm' (*Samasamajist*, December 1937, Secretary's Report). Bracegirdle was later arrested, and his lawyer applied for a writ of *habeas corpus*. Seven eminent local lawyers, including H. V. Perera, appeared for him for free and the judges who heard the case decided that the Governor had acted *ultra vires* and that the executive did not have the right to use emergency laws where there was no emergency. Bracegirdle was freed and left for Britain of his own accord later that year. He made a few appearances on left-wing platforms in England, but was not thereafter active in politics.

The Bracegirdle incident was important for the LSSP for several reasons. It gave a great deal of publicity to the party and an opportunity to show leadership on two fronts: against British rule, and against British planters who were the strongest group of capitalists in Ceylon. The LSSP secretary admitted that the deportation order gave Bracegirdle and the party 'marvellous popularity and advertised the party in the remotest corners of the land.' The Bracegirdle affair was referred to as the party's 'first clear engagement with Imperialism', in which the honours went entirely to the LSSP (*Samasamajist*, December 1937). The incident also alerted the party towards the need for action among plantation labour.

In his annual report for the LSSP in 1937, the President of the LSSP, Colvin R. de Silva had stated that there was not a great amount of feeling against capitalism in the country as it was concentrated in the plantations but that labour on estates was not yet 'sufficiently conscious to become the main centre of the attack on capitalism' (*Samasamajist*, December 1937). He reversed his position on this issue a few years later, when there were militant strikes and violent confrontations in the plantations in the late 1930s.

The political battles of the LSSP moved to the legislature and by 1936 the LSSP had two members in the State Council who led the agitation on the Bracegirdle issue. The LSSP had accused the planters of having put pressure on the government to secure Bracegirdle's deportation. Philip Gunawardena, speaking in May 1937 in the State Council, said: 'the step has been taken at the request of planters' (*Hansard*, 5 May 1937: 979). The other LSSP member, N. M. Perera, said the government was frightened that Bracegirdle was going to expose 'the villainous acts of planters' to the public (*Hansard*, 5 May 1937: 975). As a method of protesting against the Governor, when he was due to express the colony's loyalty to the new British King, the two LSSP members in the State Council along with an independent social democrat Dr A. P. de Zoysa, organised a filibuster in May 1937 to keep the unpopular Governor Stubbs waiting. On this occasion Gunawardena gave notice of a motion that:

As it is evident that a state of imminent emergency has arisen by virtue of the conspiratorial meeting of certain sections of the planting community and by virtue of the fact that in their less sober moments a sort of Klu Klux Klan has been formed ... the House is of the opinion that no planter should be allowed to possess firearms ... (*Hansard*, 12 May 1937: 1087).

That same year the LSSP President said that the Bracegirdle affair showed that 'European planterdom would be the source from which fascism in Sri Lanka would find its main strength' (*Samasamajist* Dec. 1937, speech of Colvin R. de Silva). The Bracegirdle episode also brought into the open the growing alarm of the government towards the activities of the LSSP, particularly towards its growing advocacy of the cause of plantation labour. It also was the first occasion when the question of the spread of communism in Sri Lanka was treated both by the government and the media as a matter of importance, foreshadowing government attitudes a few years later when the LSSP began to organise plantation workers on a systematic basis.

In a confidential dispatch to the Secretary of State in 1937, the Governor described the LSSP as a 'small local party run by young men with more money than brains' and indicating that the influence of the LSSP was growing, stated

Hitherto no notice has been taken of the antics of local Communist party who are generally regarded as half-wits or degenerates. I ... think that we have been far too lenient ... and I am now considering what steps to take ... as to the spread of Communist opinions among the lower classes. The organ of the Communist party, the 'Samasamajaya' is becoming more and more scurrilous. For example ... Her Majesty Queen Victoria was referred to by a Sinhalese phrase meaning 'the woman Victoria'.⁹

A virulent campaign against the LSSP was also carried on by the British-owned *Times of Ceylon*, representing British interests, which contrasted the severe measures taken in India against communists, with the local government's alleged weakness in dealing with the LSSP and allowing the Indian socialists, such as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, to visit the island.

In Ceylon, not only are the Samasamajists allowed to proclaim their views openly in the State Council, but we allow them to import 'comrades from India' ... the Government cannot claim to be doing its duty in protecting the ignorant masses from their pernicious teachings (*Times of Ceylon*, 24 April 1937).

The *Times of Ceylon* kept up the onslaught for several weeks, complaining that 'blatant preaching of the most subversive doctrines [had] gone on for some time in Ceylon' (30 April 1937), and alleged that 'red agents are overrunning the island preaching class hatred and sedition among the ignorant masses (3 May 1937). The need for clamping down on LSSP activities was urged by both the Governor and the *Times of Ceylon*, which editorially remarked: 'the deportation of a single Communist does not by any means make Ceylon safe ... unless his comrades profit by this lesson ... strict measures must be taken to curb their activities' (*Times of Ceylon*, 30 April 1937). It also warned that 'a watch must be kept on the more dangerous indigenous agitators ... [and] to deal with seditionists such as these, the law must be amended promptly' (5 May 1937).

⁹ SLNA File 131/37, 15 May 1937.

The Governor informed the Secretary of State that if the powers under the Order in Council of 1896 were held to be *ultra vires*, it would be essential 'to pass immediately—with or without the consent of the State Council—legislation giving the Governor or possibly the Minister of Home Affairs adequate powers to deal with such cases.'¹⁰ The Secretary of State did not agree and the disapproval of the Colonial Office with the Governor's mishandling of the situation was reflected in the replacement in June 1937 of Governor Stubbs by a new Governor, Andrew Caldecott, who was considered to be more in touch with the times.

The LSSP had on all points scored a remarkable political victory in the Bracegirdle affair. On the issue of constitutional rights, a virtual united front of all Sri Lankans was achieved; in the political field, a decisive rebuff was given to the Governor both on the use of outdated legislation and on the question of consulting the elected ministers. In the context of the labour movement, the issue aroused mass excitement both in the towns and the estates; Bracegirdle was represented as a white man who in his championing of the rights of the workers had incurred the wrath of the planters, police and the Governor. The LSSP became identified with a militant policy of challenge to both colonial rule in general and the planters in particular.

The involvement of the LSSP in the struggles of the plantation workers was particularly significant since the party formed the first Left trade-union among estate workers. Its political endorsement of equity and social justice, through militant action if necessary, stirred the imagination and support of the plantation workers who for over a century had formed the most exploited section of the working class. In the words of the LSSP leader, Leslie Goonewardena the party 'brought politics to the people using a language and terms that they could understand' (Goonewardena 1960: 6). In these ways, the LSSP could be viewed as the vanguard of the militant labour struggles on the plantations. The subsequent period witnessed a series of violent strikes in the plantation sector under the leadership of the LSSP union, until five of its leaders were arrested in June 1940. Two years later, they managed to escape their detention and flee to India.

Part II of the current volume has demonstrated that a variety of outsiders played important roles in protesting against and calling for reform of the dismal conditions of work and life of plantation labour. While some of the more courageous government officials focused on

¹⁰ SLNA File CF/131/37. Confidential Despatch from Governor to Secretary of State, 15 May 1937.

bringing about legal reform in the provision of social facilities such as education and health, the local professionals were also important in highlighting the iniquitous laws that governed Ceylon's 'own form of slavery' on the plantations. The labour and political rights of these workers were also the concern of Indian nationalists, trade union leaders and the Left, who laid the foundations for the mobilisation of plantation labour and the development of trade unionism amongst these workers. Some of these outsiders, particularly women political activists, took up the rights of plantation women workers. Not all of them were critical of the system itself or the Planter Raj in general but they all had a 'cause' that led them to engage with and even combat the authorities to improve the lot of the plantation workers. This book, in emphasising the different roles of outsiders in challenging the plantation order, provides a deeper understanding of not only the range and depth of the deprivation that characterised the Planter Raj, but also the different levels at which contestations were undertaken to counter the power of those in authority.

PART three

Franchise, National Politics
and Militant Unionism

PART

THE

THE

Controversies and Contestations over Franchise

While different Ceylonese associations had taken up the demand for constitutional reforms since the First World War, some of them had gone as far as claiming the right to self-governance along the lines granted to India under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. In 1919, the newly formed Ceylon National Congress, composed of various political organisations under its first President, Ponnambalam Arunachalam, took up both political and other democratic demands such as progressive labour legislation and trade union rights. In 1920, Governor Manning, under these pressures and in an attempt to contain the unrest, provided for a Legislative Council with a majority of 'unofficials', of whom sixteen were elected on a restrictive vote, as well as fourteen 'officials' and seven members nominated by the Governor. While this response fell far short of what had been demanded, the Governor managed to win over some of the more conservative sections by promising further reforms if they participated in the Legislative Council (Jayawardena 1972: 197–98).¹

THE DONOUGHMORE COMMISSION AND UNIVERSAL FRANCHISE

The demand for further political reforms resulted in the appointment of a commission led by the Earl of Donoughmore, which included Sir Matthew Nathan, Sir Geoffrey Butler and Dr Drummond Shiels, representing

¹ While further reforms in 1923–24 increased the numbers of 'unofficials' to thirty-seven, and reduced the number of officials to twelve, the Governor continued to have reserve powers on questions of 'paramount importance' when only the 'official' votes were taken (Jayawardena 1972: 194–98).

the Conservative, Liberal and Labour parties in the British parliament respectively (Mendis 2005: 184). Its report spoke of the absence of social legislation in Ceylon, which was not surprising because the Sinhalese and Hindu leaders were the products of 'centuries of patriarchal and feudal government' (Jayawardena 1972: 267). The main contentious issue of the period, however, was that of the franchise, which was limited to 4 per cent of the total population of Ceylon, based on literacy, income and property qualifications (Report of the Special Commission on the Constitution 1928: 32).

The Ceylon Labour Party led the clamour for universal suffrage, including women's franchise, but the Ceylon National Congress demurred, arguing that men earning less than Rs 50 a month should not be given voting rights, since such voters 'would not use responsibility in exercising the franchise' (Jayawardena 1972: 265). The Women's Franchise Union, however, was clear that all women, no matter which class they belonged to, should be allowed to vote. As noted in Chapter 9, Agnes de Silva, the delegate of the Women's Franchise Union in responding to the Donoughmore Commission on the question as to whether franchise should be extended to plantation women, had no hesitation in stating that the latter were also women and therefore should have the vote.

In addition to the class issue, caste biases also informed the opinions of the more conservative Tamil politicians from the North. For example, Sir P. Ramanathan, who in the 1870s had spoken against oppressive legislation on coffee stealing, remarked that it a 'grave mistake' to give non-*vellala*² castes the franchise, remarking that it would lead to 'mob rule' and was 'an anathema to the Hindu way of life' (Russell 1982: 16). The so-called lower castes were not only a majority in the plantation sector but formed a significant section of the people of northern and eastern Ceylon. According to Russell, Ramanathan had by this time become rigidly orthodox in his religious and social views to the point of being a 'dyed in the wool' reactionary (1982: 16).

Dr Drummond Shiels, the British Labour Party member of parliament in the Commission, unofficially urged the local labour leader A. E. Goonesinha to press for universal suffrage. In 1928, the Donoughmore Report recommended voting rights to all males over 21 and women over

² Till the 1960s, the Vellalas constituted the most numerous and powerful caste in the Northern Province (Wickramasinghe 2006: 261). It was not uncommon for its members to impose 'extralegal restrictions' on the minority castes, including barring them from entering temples, drawing water from wells near high caste families, attending schools and even converting to Christianity or Buddhism (262).

30 years of age. It argued that 'the extension of the franchise' was more urgent than any 'increase in responsible government', adding that 'when a considered increase in responsible government is being recommended ... the question of the franchise becomes of first importance' (Jayawardena 1972: 267). The Colonial Office, however, went further than what the Commission had recommended and took the decision to give franchise to all women over 21 years of age. While these political reforms were significantly less far reaching than self-government, the Ceylonese politicians eventually accepted the Donoughmore Report after some hesitation. By these measures, Ceylon became 'the first British colony in Asia—and indeed the first Asian country—to enjoy the privilege of universal suffrage' (de Silva 1985: 422). It also meant that all adult women and Indian plantation workers were allowed to vote in spite of criticisms from different sections of the population against the granting of such rights.

The Donoughmore Commission also proposed a legislature (State Council) of fifty elected members, with eight nominated by the Governor to represent minorities. The State Council was to be divided into seven executive committees that supervised the relevant government departments.³ Each committee elected a chairperson who became a minister, forming the Board of Ministers, which also included the three British officers of state—the Chief Secretary, Financial Secretary and Legal Secretary—who were under the Governor, who was given wide ranging powers.

PLANTATION POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Although the Indian workers did not possess any political rights prior to the Donoughmore reforms, there were two members in the Legislative Council, nominated by the Governor, to represent the interests of Indians resident in the Ceylon. When the Donoughmore Commission considered reforming the constitution, a stormy discussion arose on the franchise rights of plantation workers. Nationalist and class biases were evident in the attempts to prevent the extension of full political rights to plantation labour. Some Sinhala politicians played the ethnic card, arguing that if these workers gained voting rights they could influence

³ The executive committees were for health, education, labour, local administration, home affairs, agriculture, land and communications works, and industry and commerce (Mendis 2005: 187).

the outcome of elections in many areas. A campaign was launched to stir up fears among the Sinhalese about becoming a political minority in some areas, particularly in the Kandyan region, which was the centre of plantation production.

At the same time, there were fears expressed that voting rights for the Indian plantation workers could result in Sinhalese priorities being subsumed by Indian interests in the region. Even earlier, in the Legislative Council, some representatives openly voiced fears that the Sinhalese would be electorally 'swamped.' According to D. S. Senanayake (later the first prime minister), the proposal of the Donoughmore Commission to extend the franchise to Indians was alarming as the Sinhalese were a minority with respect to India and were the 'victims' of injustice.

The Sinhalese are... an unfortunate community ... the Sinhalese have been misunderstood and even their generosity forgotten ... I do not think there is any other community like the Sinhalese who have consented to penalize themselves in order to give privileges to others ... the Indians ... have a big country. *We have only this small bit of land for ourselves ... we want this country for ourselves* (Hansard, 8 November 1928; emphasis added).

In addition, other politicians argued that the plantation workers were 'subservient' and 'ignorant' persons who were not capable of making a useful contribution to national politics. They were also aliens with little interest or ability to participate in the political life of the country. Expressing such sentiments, V. de S. Wickramanayake noted:

The Indian labourer ... goes to work at 6 in the morning and returns to his cooly lines, at 6 at night; what does he know of events in the island? ... therefore I say he is not fit or competent to give a vote on matters political (Hansard, 2 November 1928).

The only Sinhalese legislator to speak out for the enfranchisement of plantation labour was C. H. Z. Fernando, a member of the Ceylon Labour Party and an active supporter of urban labour and trade union activities. He dismissed the notions of being 'swamped' as being 'unfounded in fact' and ridiculed the 'mythical dangers of Indian domination' (Hansard, 2 November 1928). Legislators from minority communities, like K. Natesa Aiyar, A. Mahadeva and T. B. Jayah, also perceived the danger of chauvinism, which lay behind the campaign to deny political rights to plantation labour. Although not in the Labour Party himself, T. B. Jayah, a Malay, supported Indian franchise rights and claimed: 'The Labour Party

is strongly in favour of the grant of the franchise to the Indian community. Their accredited leaders say that the Sinhalese labourer will not stand in the way of the grant of the franchise to his Indian brother' (*Hansard*, 8 November 1928).

The 'accredited leader' of the Colombo working class, A. E. Goonesinha, who was at the height of his power, supported the franchise rights of Indian workers, appealing to class solidarity and ethnic unity. In contrast to sections of the Sinhala press, which were promoting ethnic disunity by stirring up propaganda against Indian Tamils, A. E. Goonesinha publicly spoke out in favour of Indian workers' political rights in 1928. Newspapers reported Goonesinha's attack on the Sinhalese leadership at a meeting of the *Gandhi Sangham*, a society set up by Goonesinha and some Ceylon Indians to promote the ideals of Gandhi.

A few plutocrats spoke of the Indians as being a menace to the Sinhalese workmen. What had these conscientious patriotic plutocrats done ... for their workmen in their times of trouble and hardships? Instead of helping their poor fellow countrymen, the plutocrats had expanded their energies in driving out the poor villager from his plot of land. Now these men had developed a sense of patriotism ... the reason for this solicitude ... was the result of the poor man being given the vote. [These] plutocrats ... went before the ... Commission and opposed ... universal suffrage. Having failed ... they now talk of depriving Indians in Ceylon of the right to vote (*Ceylon Daily News*, 10 September 1928).

In spite of Sinhala concerns, the colonial government went ahead with the policy of universal franchise and voting rights were given to all British subjects above the age of 21 who had the following qualifications:

- a) Ceylon domicile of origin or choice (domicile of choice to be dependent on five years' residence) AND
- b) Literacy and property or income qualification OR
- c) Possession of a Certificate of Permanent Settlement granted by a duly appointed officer on the condition of five years continuous residence in Ceylon.

The Donoughmore Commission, which had been specifically concerned about the position of the plantation workers, reported that:

The problem of the Indian immigrant labourers is a serious and difficult one and arises here in connection with communal representation of the Indian community. There are at present about 700,000 of these people in the island, most of them employed on the tea and rubber estates at

the higher level where Sinhalese have hitherto been unwilling to work in large numbers (*Report of the Donoughmore Commission*).

The Donoughmore Commissioners suggested that franchise based on a five-year residential qualification would allow the workers an influence on politics:

...We believe that, with the changes in the franchise recommended ... even when there is a necessary five years' residential qualification, a considerable number of these people will become entitled to a voice in the election of a territorial representative and in that way should be able to secure, perhaps, a more effective expression of their grievances and difficulties.

In spite of this restriction of franchise on the basis of five-year residential qualification, 100,000 persons of Indian origin were registered as voters (Devaraj 2008: 12).

The general elections in 1931 and 1936 were landmark events for the country as a whole, including adult women, members of the working class and all castes. They involved considerable political campaigning in the plantation areas, and for the first time, brought politics directly to the plantation workers. In 1931, two Indian Tamils, Peri Sunderam and S. P. Vytilingam were elected to the Hatton and Talawakelle seats respectively and a planter, A. Fellowes-Gordon, was elected at Bandarawela. In the new State Council, Peri Sunderam became the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce. There was renewed political agitation in plantation areas in 1936, when the number of Indian voters had risen to 145,000 (Devaraj 2008: 12). In the general election of 1936, two Indian Tamils were elected: S. P. Vytilingam (Talawakelle) and K. Natesa Aiyar (Hatton). The election of Natesa Aiyar was a step forward for the Indian workers, for he was the first politician and labour leader, as we have seen in Chapter 8, to have directly challenged the planters by introducing trade unionism to the plantations in 1931.

VILLAGE FRANCHISE AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

The increasing influence of the plantation vote in politics resulted in dismay and anxiety among some Sinhala politicians at the increased numbers of Indian voters in the general elections in 1931 and 1936. The controversial Village Committees Ordinance, therefore, was aimed at limiting the franchise rights of the plantation community. In 1889 the

village committees had been established as a unit of local government, but Europeans, Burghers and Indian workers (referred to as 'excepted persons') were excluded from the operation of the ordinance, on the grounds that they did not pay village taxes or form part of the life of the village. In 1937, the Village Communities (Amendment) Ordinance was drafted to include plantations in the village areas and to introduce a land tax on an acreage basis. A storm of protest arose among sections of the Indian population when Europeans and Burghers were removed from the class of 'excepted persons' but Indians were retained in this category, making Indian workers the only group of persons who were denied the village franchise. This exclusion was to prevent the 'outnumbering' of Sinhala villagers by plantation workers in local government elections in plantation districts.

An important moment in the process of eroding the political entitlements of the plantation community occurred in 1937 when the State Council passed the Village Committees Ordinance. The Ordinance led to a number of protests by various Indian associations in Ceylon and by the Government of India, which alleged that the Bill was based on racial discrimination. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) also opposed the Ordinance, and N. M. Perera, the LSSP member in the State Council, attacked the policies of the Board of Ministers, highlighting the class-based nature of the discrimination:

They have no objection to enfranchising European planters ... Those people who have property, even the very Chettians who have no other interest in the country but the lending of money at very exorbitant rates of interest ... are enfranchised. But when it comes to the poor labourer who has not the fortune to possess land, he is not enfranchised ... This bogey of swamping is entirely imaginary ... the interests of the Indian labourers and the vast mass of peasants and workers in this country are the same. The fight is against the capitalist class, whether they are Indians or Ceylonese (*Hansard* 1937, Vol. III: 4150-52).

Governor Andrew Caldecott reserved his assent to the Bill. A second ordinance, however, was passed in the State Council and assented to by the Governor in 1938, under which *all* workers *resident* on plantations, whatever their ethnic origin, were to be excluded from the village committee franchise. Since the number of Sinhalese workers resident on plantations was small, the Bill mainly had the effect of debarring all Indian plantation workers from the local franchise. The controversy that ensued over this ordinance resulted in making these workers not only the centre of political controversy but also of increasing their militancy.

The main fear of the Sinhala bourgeoisie was related to the growing influence of the Indian working-class vote on electoral politics. By 1936, the Indian electorate had risen to 145,000, and two Indian representatives were elected to the State Council. In addition, several others had been successful because of the votes of plantation workers, including opposition politicians such as George E. de Silva in Kandy. Sinhalese leaders on their part made complaints that regulations had not been properly followed resulting in a higher electorate among the plantation workers than was warranted (Kodikara 1965: 78). In 1939 the Indian population was about one million and constituted approximately one-sixth of the population in the island. The fear was that if Indian workers were given citizenship rights and specifically the franchise, it was likely that Sinhalese interests would be threatened by a numerical 'Indian' bias in the up-country regions. Nationalist sentiments among the Sinhalese majority during this period were usually expressed by defining the Indians in Ceylon as aliens. As S. U. Kodikara stated:

The Indo-Ceylon question was conditioned by the political context in which it arose. Definition of political rights became a matter of such importance in the 1930s because the Donoughmore constitution had set Ceylon on the path to self-government. Every advance towards self-government ... brought to the fore the concept of Ceylonese nationality, which regarded Indians as a predominantly alien community (1965: 90).

ETHNIC HOSTILITY TO INDIAN URBAN WORKERS

Anti-Indian sentiments were not restricted to the plantation sector but spread to the urban regions, resulting in a campaign of hostility against Indian urban workers in Ceylon. The unemployment that accompanied the economic depression of the early 1930s gave rise to a sense of economic insecurity which fuelled the campaign of animosity against Indian workers, who were accused of usurping the jobs needed by the Ceylonese. Some local politicians used this opportunity to fuel anti-Indian sentiments by calling for the repatriation of Indian urban unskilled workers, mainly Malayalis from Kerala, known as *Kochis*, who were employed in factories, railways, in the spinning and weaving mill and in the harbour. Even the labour leader A. E. Goonesinha, who had worked closely with Natesa Aiyar in the early 1920s and who had supported working-class solidarity as well as franchise for the plantation workers, changed his position.

In March 1933, Goonesinha moved a resolution in the State Council that non-nationals should not be appointed to the public service where nationals were available. His earlier multi-ethnic slogans swiftly changed to chauvinism during the economic depression when the union he led, the Ceylon Labour Union, spearheaded a campaign against the Tamil and Malayali workers of Colombo.

The government's policy confirmed its attitude to Indian labour and its need to appease these perceived fears of the Sinhalese. It took the position that because of the economic conditions prevailing in the country in the 1930s—namely growing unemployment, falling standards of living, increasing population and limited opportunities for employment—it was important to replace Indian with Sinhala labour. It decided that all daily paid workers hired after 1 April 1934 were to be retrenched and repatriated. The Minister of Communications and Works, J. L. Kotelewala, is supposed to have claimed credit for this idea stating that 'stringent regulations should be enforced to prevent their return to Ceylon for employment here' (Peebles 2001: 202). This position was contradicted by the report of a commission appointed in 1936, headed by Sir Edward Jackson, that had a mandate to investigate whether the immigration of workers from south India was increasing or decreasing; whether this immigration was the cause of unemployment in Sri Lanka; and whether controls should be imposed on immigration. The report clearly indicated that Indian immigration had not resulted in any economic disadvantage to the 'permanent population'. In particular, it noted that large numbers of Indians would be necessary to work the estates for some time to come and emphasised that Indians dominated those fields of employment where the Sinhala people did not desire to work.⁴ The findings of this report were not, however, accepted by the Ceylon government.

Amongst the group of persons who did not support the government's policy of restricting work to Indian workers were the planters, who were clearly concerned that it could negatively affect their supply of labour. In August 1939, the Planters' Association passed a resolution indicating that it was 'aware of the anxiety' among the estate workers as a consequence of the government's action and wanted to 'publically assure all concerned ... that it will oppose with all strength at its command any measures which are likely to affect the well-being of estate labourers and will especially resist any action which might be directed towards involuntary repatriation

⁴ *Report of the Commissioner of Labour in Ceylon Administrative Reports for 1939, Part I, O21 and O22.*

of Indian labourers on estates in Ceylon' (*Hindu*, 15 August, 1939: 10 cited in Kurian 1989: 257).

In 1939, the State Council attempted to put into effect its policy on 'non-Ceylonese' daily-paid workers in government departments. 'Non-Ceylonese' was defined as workers not born in the country. The estimated total of Indian workers (Malayalis and Tamils) in government service in 1939 was approximately 6,000, the majority being employed in the railways, the port and the public works department. Under this scheme, 2,500 Indian urban workers were retired (Kurian 1989). As a result of repatriation and the policy of 'Ceylonisation', the proportion of Indian workers declined but as noted by Patrick Peebles, the relatively small number involved in this 'forced' retirement indicated that there was 'little quantitative effect on employment' (2001: 203).

RESPONSES OF THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY

In this climate of controversy there was great consternation among all Indians in Ceylon, who regarded these actions as a prelude to further legislation against Indians in the urban and plantation sectors. The Indian government regarded the repatriation of urban workers of Indian origin as a direct form of discrimination against all Indian workers in the island. Various Indian associations in Ceylon felt that this was yet another method of restricting the rights of Indians. In July 1939, the All-India Congress Committee passed a resolution condemning the employment policy of the Ceylon government and sent Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the most important politicians of the period, to the island to explore ways of avoiding a conflict on this issue. He was also invited by the associations of Indians in Ceylon to visit the island and review the situation. An important result of the Nehru visit was the amalgamation (on his advice) of sixteen Colombo associations of Indians and the subsequent inauguration of the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC). The CIC adopted the view that the Government of India had to influence the Ceylon government to support the interests of Indians in the island.

During this visit, Nehru addressed the plantation workers at a well attended meeting in Hatton on 22 July 1939. Natesa Aiyar also spoke, stating that the immigrant workers had been drawn to Ceylon by the promise of full citizenship rights and prosperity, but at the moment they were neither Indian nor Ceylonese citizens. He emphasised the need to determine their status and appealed to Nehru to use his good offices to see that the workers and others were allowed to settle down as citizens of

the country without discrimination (*Hindu*, 24 July 1939 cited in Kurian 1989: 255).

An editorial comment in the *Hindu* newspaper was highly critical of the stance of the Ceylon government:

Is it not obviously unfair that the Indian who sweats on estates to enable Ceylon tea to retain the world market should be debarred from handling the tea at the railway station, the warehouse, or the harbour? He has been denied the right to acquire land, vote or move about. Even his nearest relations cannot visit his residence for which he pays rent. This keeping apart of assisted and unassisted immigrations is part of the plan to keep estate labour helpless and ignorant of their rights (*Hindu* 1939: 7 cited in Kurian 1989: 256).

In the same editorial comment, reference was also made to the 'insidious' policies during economic fluctuations:

Indians are dismissed during slumps and called back during booms. In 1937, between January and May, 47,922 Indians were driven out, but in May, permission was sought to recruit 5,000. The last slump threw out of employment 123,000 persons. Of them 100,000 being Indian, were promptly sent back to India.

In light of the Ceylon government's intransigence, the Government of India enacted a ban on the emigration of unskilled labour from India to Ceylon in August 1939. The most immediate reason for this step was the termination of employment of estate workers in 1939 and the 'declared policy' of the Ceylon government 'to discontinue, in course of time, the employment of many more such Indians.' Given what was perceived as the 'great uncertainty' in the island regarding the employment of unskilled labour from India, the Indian government decided that it was 'necessary and expedient' to issue this ban.⁵

This move by the Indian government was welcomed by the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC), whose President V. R. M. Letchmanan Chettiar issued a press statement applauding the action (*Hindu*, 19 August 1939). The CIC held several meetings on the estates explaining the significance of the ban to the workers, and indicating that it was a means of placing pressure on the Ceylon government to provide them

⁵ Report of the Commissioner of Labour, *Ceylon Administration Reports for 1939*, Part I, O21 and O22 cited in Kurian 1989: 258.

a better legal and political status in the country. According to another CIC leader, A. Aziz, the workers at that time were keen on gaining citizenship and other democratic rights in Ceylon (Aziz, personal interview, January 1998). Both the CIC and the plantation workers were keen to wrest the initiative to trigger a negotiating process whereby persons of Indian origin could be treated on an equal footing with the local population (Aziz, personal communication, 21 March 2012).

CITIZENSHIP AND FRANCHISE RIGHTS

In the late 1930s, there was again a period of political fervour, partly in preparation for the elections due in 1941. This election enthusiasm extended to the estates, where, in 1939, 225,000 persons from the up-country Tamil plantation community had voting rights. Commenting on the strength of the plantation electorate vote, P. P. Devaraj asserted that this figure was actually proportionally less than warranted in relation to the Indian estate population when compared with other communities (Kurian 1989). But even these numbers continued to worry the Sinhalese bourgeoisie in the region. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, then Minister for Local Administration, expressed such thoughts at a exploratory meeting between India and Ceylon, held in November 1940, to discuss the issues of citizenship and franchise.⁶

The danger arises from the fact that the extension of political franchise to that number will result in giving greater influence to them than their number connotes. In other words, in view of the divisions among the other 5 million people, the Indians, a limited number of capitalists can [become] a force which would control the whole life of the country. There is no question about that—that is the fear.

The Sinhala politicians objected to the registration procedure for voting on the grounds that 'the qualifications were not properly checked and persons were registered ... even though they did not have the necessary qualifications' and a new condition was made for registration requiring plantations workers to 'appear for a personal interview' (Devaraj 2008: 12). This was not adequately publicised and large numbers were not

⁶ Indo-Ceylon Relations Exploratory Conference. Report of the Ceylon Delegation. *Sessional Papers* Nos 8 and 9 of 1941 (Government of Ceylon, Colombo, 1941, p. 12) cited in Kurian 1989: 260).

interviewed, resulting in voters being reduced by 1941 to 168,000. Peri Sunderam, the former minister who had been elected from Hatton, also saw these trends as a direct threat to the interests of plantation labour:

In the last [1931] and the present [1936] State Council, on a population basis, plantation labour was entitled to return at least eight members. But as a result of camouflage, no more than two representatives could be returned. It is, therefore, not a little surprising that the Government seeks to further restrict the Indian franchise by a tightening up of the procedure of the registration of voters in the plantation area. Such a step forebodes unfairness, discrimination and serious prejudice to the interests of plantation labour (*Hindu*, 3 September 1939: 13 cited in Kurian 1989: 255).

This reduction in voters from the plantation community was later criticised by the Soulbury Commission (Devaraj 2008: 12–13). The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 led to the postponement of the scheduled elections in 1941 and it was not until 1947 that the next elections were held for parliament.

In these different ways, the controversies over citizenship and franchise changed the political status of plantation workers in the country; from being isolated and controlled by the planters for nearly a century, they were able to exercise their electoral rights and influence democratic processes and electoral outcomes. Challenges to the fundamental rights for Indian workers by members of the Sinhalese community led to an increased political consciousness among all Indians in Sri Lanka, including Indian business interests and Indian urban and plantation workers. Plantation workers under British rule in Ceylon had obtained the two pillars of liberal democracy—universal suffrage and citizenship. These very achievements, ironically, resulted in campaigns to restrict the potential political rights of these workers. The turning point came in 1948 after the country had gained independence, when plantation workers lost their democratic rights of citizenship and franchise.

Wildfire in Lipton's Tea Garden

There were suspensions of workers and dismissals, frequent interventions by the unions and the Labour Department, and there were strikes. The labourers themselves in the first flush of their new freedom began to be less docile and more and more aggressive.

Walter Thalgodapitiya, a former judge commenting on confrontations on the plantations (A. C. Alles 1977).

The provision of franchise and the rise of the first trade union led to increased numbers of plantation workers exercising their democratic rights in the 1931 and 1936 elections under the Donoughmore Constitution. But the potential of these workers to mobilise and challenge the planters and the state was not fully recognised or appreciated by some of the local bureaucrats over the decade, who in the words of the Controller of Labour in 1939, F. C. Gimson, viewed the Indian plantation labourer as 'docile, amenable to discipline and a good worker'.¹ Even the Agent of the Government of India referred to the immigrant as 'loyal and hardworking', adding that his 'honesty, simplicity and docility are almost proverbial'.² According to Gimson, 'the situation was carefully watched' and while trade unionism would inevitably make gains on the plantations, it would be 'of slow growth'.³ Those in authority felt that immigrant labour on the plantations had not reached levels of consciousness that had produced unrest in other parts of the world.⁴

¹ Labour Dept File A/2/40.

² Labour Dept File A/2/40.

³ *Administrative Report of the Controller of Labour*, 15 May 1939.

⁴ *Administrative Report of the Controller of Labour*, 15 May 1939.

In these circumstances it was also predicted that there would be no manifestations of widespread discontent.

Nevertheless, the Department of Labour thought it timely to advise the Planters' Association to adopt a sympathetic attitude to the formation of workers' associations and even to encourage their growth. Although the Planters' Association gave this assurance, the Assistant Controller of Labour stated that the planters' attitude to the formation of associations went against this policy. He claimed that attempts had been made 'to induce labourers to join associations selected and recommended by the subordinate staff and the Superintendent' and added: 'whenever the labourers have made attempts to join associations according to their own choice, there has invariably been trouble. The leaders of these associations were always marked men on estates.' The same report made the point that workers who made complaints against subordinate staff risked dismissal, the result being that this fear led workers to 'put up with any form of treatment ... *this mock submission has been taken to be a sign of happiness and contentment on estates*' (Administrative Report, Controller of Labour, 1939, emphasis added).

LIGHTNING STRIKES, 1939-40

The hope for a slow, orderly growth of unionism was shattered by a wave of strikes in the plantations in 1939 and 1940, when the entire plantation sector was convulsed by widespread unrest. The first major strike occurred in April 1939, when 400 workers on Kotiyagala Estate in Dimbula struck work over the right of association. The workers had been refused permission to form an association, which they claimed was for the discouragement of gambling and drinking, and the promotion of thrift,⁵ but which the superintendent said was 'intended to be subversive of authority and aimed at doing away with the head kanganies.'⁶ The blame for the strike was put on 'an agitator' who had not only started a night school in the rest-house stable, but was also trying to form a branch of Natesa Aiyar's union on the plantation. The strike caused a great deal of alarm among planters, who felt that 'this outbreak of lawlessness' would spread to other plantations. The inquiry to settle the dispute was attended by the Controller of Labour, two labour inspectors, the Chairman of the Planters' Association (R. C. Scott), the Chairman of the District Planters' Association, and the management of the estate concerned. It

⁵ *Administrative Report, Controller of Labour, 1939.*

⁶ Minutes of Planters' Association of Ceylon, 19 May 1939.

was held in the presence of the strikers, and some of them put forward their grievances against the head kanganyes, and demanded the right to form an association.

During this period, the differences in approach to labour matters between the Controller of Labour, F. C. Gimson, and the planters became evident. Gimson referred to the policy of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Malcolm MacDonald, with regard to trade unions in the colonies, and the need to recognise associations of workers in order to prevent the development of illegal political organisations. He therefore urged the planters to encourage associations and to 'guide the formation of these associations and see that their objectives develop on lines which can meet with approval', adding that if labour trouble was to be avoided, 'Superintendents should pay the strictest attention to the welfare of the labourers in every particular respect.' Gimson also recognised the importance of education in increasing the class consciousness of the plantation workers. He rejected the planters' view that the strike on Kotiyagala Estate was merely the outcome of agitation inspired by Natesa Aiyar, and stated that 'similar strikes had taken place in other countries, and as the Ceylonese estate labourers were more educated, Ceylon would experience further labour disputes.'⁷

This prediction of the Controller of Labour proved to be correct and an unparalleled wave of strikes and labour unrest, which had begun in Dimbula, spread to all other planting districts. The Controller claimed that by December 1939 there had been forty-two disputes on estates, noting also that this figure was not conclusive, as it gave 'no indication of the real extent of the unrest *which is to be found on almost every estate up country*.'⁸ By mid-1940 the whole of the plantation sector was affected by strikes.

Most of these strikes took place under the leadership of one of three trade unions representing the workers. Natesa Aiyar's union had by this

⁷ Annual Report of the Controller of Labour, 1939.

⁸ Controller of Labour files of 1939, emphasis added. The examples given below reflect the typical issues on which workers went on strike in 1939.

Fordyce Group, Dickoya, 12 September. 'Strike threatened owing to discontinuance of labourer on the alleged ground that he had organized a meeting protesting against the kangany';

Powysland Agrapatna, 27 November. 'Strike to secure dismissal of Head Kangany';

Faithlie, Kotagala, December. 'Unrest because of allegations against subordinate staff';

Torrington, Agrapatna, 11 December. 'Strike as kangany opposed activities of labourer in organizing a union.'

time revived its organisation and had its offices in Hatton, Nuwara Eliya and Badulla; it also had agents on a majority of tea estates in the up-country region. The Ceylon Indian Congress, under the impetus given by the visit of Jawaharlal Nehru, was also by 1939 in the process of making itself felt among plantation labour, and the LSSP union, the Ceylon Estate Workers' Union was just coming into prominence. These three unions were active in espousing the grievances of their members. Pamphlets and tracts were distributed, and clandestine visits to plantations were made by trade union officials in violation of the archaic criminal trespass laws. Meetings were held in the towns and villages near the plantations, and workers were urged to take action in defence of their rights, to join unions, and to strike to secure their demands.

The spirit of unrest was, however, so pervasive that demands were put forward and strikes launched even without trade union leadership; it is noteworthy that the absence of such leadership did not deter the workers from combining and seeking the redress of their grievances. The Controller of Labour spoke of situations when negotiations 'were rendered difficult by the absence of any recognized leaders', adding that settlements arrived at in the course of negotiations were dependent upon 'the subsequent approval of the workers' themselves.⁹ Almost all the strikes in 1939 were the result of the workers' grievances against the head kangany and other subordinate staff.

The strikes of 1939, which had been mainly confined to the Dimbula and Dickoya planting districts, spread like wildfire in 1940 to other areas such as Uva, Kandy and the Kelani Valley. The grievances remained much the same—disaffection over the head kangany system and dismissals of workers and especially the use of criminal trespass laws to eject dismissed workers from the estates. The involvement of Great Britain in the Second World War in September 1939 forced the colonial office to take a closer look into the labour unrest on the plantations, as they were aware of the threat posed by strikes to the stability of the country. In February 1940, the Controller of Labour remarked that the majority of strikes were lightning strikes, which were usually 'preceded by a period of marked unrest.' These strikes were generally not in the furtherance of economic demands, but were the result 'of incidents seemingly trivial in nature, such as a change in the mode of issue of rice, high-handed action on the part of the subordinate staff, dismissal of a labourer on inadequate grounds, or refusal of recognition of an association.'¹⁰ By March 1940,

⁹ *Administrative Report of Controller of Labour, 1939.*

¹⁰ *Administrative Report of Controller of Labour, 1940.*

the labour unrest was aggravated by a prolonged drought, which caused a shortage of work on the tea plantations. There was also an increase of strikes caused by dismissals and much tension when workers dismissed for union activities refused to leave the plantations and were charged with criminal trespass. The question of dismissals was naturally a source of great concern, especially because housing was tied to the job and dismissed workers had difficulty getting other employment. Moreover, if they went back to India, there was no hope of returning to Sri Lanka because of the ban on immigration (see p. 151).

LSSP-LED TRADE UNIONS

The LSSP-led unions had, as mentioned earlier, begun organising workers just before 1939, and were prominent in the agitation and strikes of this period. Their strikes, moreover, were marked by a militancy not seen earlier in the plantations, often resulting in violent clashes with the planters and the police. The LSSP unions encouraged the workers to resist the kanganies, superintendents and police by all means. Another feature of these strikes was a demand for wage increases. This was a real threat to the plantations, which, for the first time, had to face aggressive action from their workers who had combined, not only for the redress of particular grievances, as before, but also on economic issues.

The LSSP, with its programme of opposition to imperialism and local capitalism, had, since its inauguration in 1935, opposed British rule in the country. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, it had declared that the party was against the island's participation in the war, which it said was being fought between imperialist powers. The party at that time gave particular importance to the organisation of unions in the plantation sector, affirming that it 'marked the first entry of plantation workers as a class-conscious force into the trade union arena' (*Sama Samajist*, 21 February 1952). For all these reasons—its anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist political stance, its organisation of workers to pursue economic demands, and its inculcation of militant class-conscious attitudes among the workers—the LSSP aroused the enmity of the planter community, leading to strong demands for the banning of the party.

Protests against LSSP activity on plantations came from both the planters and the Controller of Labour. In April 1940, the Planters' Association and the Ceylon Estates Proprietary Association, in a memorandum to the Secretary of State, pointed out that 'The Sama Samaj, or local Communist Party, are taking a prominent and increasing

part in the stirring up of disaffection.¹¹ The Controller of Labour, reporting in May 1940, said that the LSSP trade union was 'associated with disorder', adding that 'the presence of agitation accompanied by violence had made police action necessary.'¹² In June 1940, the Controller reported that during that month, the police had intervened in a number of estates where restoration of law and order was necessary or where the life of the superintendent was thought to be in danger. He alleged that the LSSP Estate Workers Union was responsible 'for inflaming the minds' of the workers by means of propaganda conducted through the aid of 'speeches and leaflets.'¹³

One of the chief weapons of the LSSP was the use of mass meetings in the bazaars of nearby towns, which attracted the plantation workers. Whereas the management could prevent union officials from visiting the plantations, they were not able to prevent the workers from going to the nearest town to listen to the speeches of union officials. George Bolster, a planter from Uva, said the unrest on plantations was caused by the 'seditious and lying talk' of the LSSP leaders:

They insult the King, the Governor, the Police, and Superintendents ... at one meeting the King was referred to as a white-faced pig and the police as paid dogs in the service of the thieving rascals i.e. the superintendents. False figures are quoted to show we steal thousands of rupees which the coolie should get, and the coolies are told that they are entitled to a large number of things which are not laid down in the Labour Ordinance.¹⁴

THE MOOLOYA STRIKE

Between December 1939 and May 1940, the LSSP union led a series of militant strikes which were fought in a spirit of aggressiveness. One of the most important and spectacular strikes of the period took place on Mooloya Estate in January 1940. A teacher on the estate, Jeganathan, had enrolled workers in the LSSP-led Estate Workers' Union, and had been dismissed from the estate for his activities. This resulted in a strike of a part of the labour force. The picketing of non-strikers by strikers

¹¹ P.A. File, Memorandum of Planters' Association and C.E.P.A.

¹² SLNA, File A/2/40. Report of Controller of Labour, 15 May 1940.

¹³ Report of Controller of Labour, 26 June 1940.

¹⁴ File A/2/40, Letter of George Bolster, intercepted by wartime censor, 28 May 1940.

led to the estate authorities summoning the police. The secretary of the union, P. M. Velusamy, took over the leadership of the strike and urged the other workers to strike. He addressed large gatherings of workers, putting forward their demands which included an increase of pay. He was arrested and sentenced to three months rigorous imprisonment for criminal trespass. Meetings were held at which LSSP speakers urged the strikers to stand firm, and leaflets were distributed which the authorities described as seditious and inflammatory.¹⁵ The main demand of the strikers was an increase of pay, this strike being the first occasion when a demand for wage increases became the important issue for organised labour. A leaflet was issued stating that: 'what the labourers want is an increase of 16 cents in their wages ... we will fight till we get that increase ... fear not ... victory is ours ... labourers of the world unite.'¹⁶

After police action against the strikers led to the death of a worker, the atmosphere was 'tense with strikes and unrest.' The superintendent of the estate and the British assistants had panicked and sent away their wives and children. On 10 January 1940, according to police evidence, while a police car was patrolling the estate, a crowd of strikers advanced on the police with a worker named Govinden leading the crowd, 'armed with a club and a knife ... and urging the crowd to go forward.' The police being in supposedly imminent danger, 'Sergeant Suraweera fired and Govinden was killed.' The LSSP version was that as the conviction of Velusamy did not deter the strikers, the planters and the police felt the need 'for some extraordinary action by themselves in order to break the strike.' The tension grew rapidly. The police patrol, which had accidentally knocked down a worker, found itself face to face with a crowd, and in the excitement of the moment and influenced by the prevailing feeling for 'the need for strong police action', the police sergeant shot and killed Govinden.¹⁷

This was the first time that a plantation worker had died in the course of trade union agitation; the incident had political and constitutional repercussions that made the LSSP trade union activity on plantations a matter of concern to planters and the government. The LSSP, both in the State Council and outside, highlighted the shooting and condemned the planters and the police. A commission appointed by the government to inquire into the incident found that the shooting was not justified in law but that the sergeant had acted in good faith with the intention of defending persons and property and the act of shooting was 'an error

¹⁵ *Sessional Paper XV of 1940*.

¹⁶ Quoted in *Sessional Paper XV of 1940*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Sessional Paper XV of 1940*, p. 3.

of quick decisions and an act of sudden fear.¹⁸ Governor Caldecott, attributing the involvement of the Samasamajists to the problems the workers had with the planters, claimed that many planters were 'survivals of the feudal age with the mentality of benevolent slave masters'.¹⁹ These were strong words reflecting the official attitude towards the planters.

What is more, the aftermath of the Mooloya shooting led to a constitutional crisis. The Minister of Home Affairs had asked the Inspector-General of Police to postpone the prosecutions of arrested strikers from Mooloya Estate pending the inquiry by the Commission. The procedure laid down under the Constitution was that any direction by a minister to the head of a department should have the authorisation of the Executive Committee and the ratification of the Governor, but this practice had never been strictly observed. The Inspector-General of Police refused to carry out the minister's order, the Governor supported him, and the Board of Ministers resigned from office on 7 February 1940. The crisis was settled by the appointment of a select committee to advise on ministerial decisions that needed the approval of the Executive Committee and the Governor's ratification.

THE RANGABODDE STRIKE

The LSSP-led strikes spread to other districts, including the Uva province—the most remote of the tea-growing areas, whose planters (often referred to as the 'wild men of Uva') were known for their diehard attitudes. When the LSSP unions penetrated the region, they met with great resistance from the planters, and the strikes in Uva were characterised by violent disorder and clashes with the police. One of the strikes in this province led by the LSSP union was on Rangabodde Estate, Ramboda, which lasted from 1 April to 21 May 1940 and involved 700 workers. The main demands were the dismissal of the head kangany and the *kanakapulle* (KP or accountant/assistant foreman) for alleged malpractices, which included the underweighing of tea leaf plucked by the women workers. The estate management called in the police who, according to the *Samasamajists*, 'lathi charged men, women and children mercilessly' and arrested a number of the workers. There was an open clash between the strikers and the police, and armed reinforcements were stationed on the estate. Resistance was shown to the police, the

¹⁸ *Sessional Paper XV of 1940*, p. 3.

¹⁹ CO/54/974/7, Extract from private and personal letter from Governor Caldecott to the Secretary of State, January 1940.

superintendent's house was stoned, and when several workers were arrested, the entire labour force walked fourteen miles to the Nuwara Eliya Court to protest (*Samasamajist*, 21 February 1952).

The LSSP in later years, described the strike as 'one of the most militant and heroic struggles ever conducted by any section of the working class in Ceylon' (*Samasamajist*, 21 February 1952). An interesting aspect of this strike was the involvement of the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) trade union. The dismissal of the head kangany, which had been demanded by the strikers, was supported by some 200 workers who belonged to the CIC. The workers were in debt to the head kangany to the amount of Rs 16,000 and protested against the head kangany system which made this possible. The strike led the Governor to note that the head kangany system had created workers' indebtedness in the majority of estates and that in his opinion it was 'doomed and without any present or future justification.'²⁰

A settlement was reached with the intervention of the Labour Department whereby workers were free to belong to a union, and the employers agreed not to resort to victimisation of union members. The strikers were to be taken back unconditionally. By applying to the management, any worker would be transferred from the head kangany's gang. The superintendent of the estate, however, reserved the right of denying admittance of union officials to the estate, with the workers giving an undertaking to present their grievances to the superintendent in the first instance.

ATTAMPITIYA AND WEWESSA STRIKES

Two other major strikes led by the LSSP unions took place on the Attampitiya and Wewessa estates in 1940. The workers on Attampitiya estate demanded recognition of the union, the dismissal of two KPs against whom they had grievances, the closing of the estate tavern and the abolition of the 'truck system' which compelled them to buy from the estate shop. The demands also included an increase of wages to 65 cents a day and shorter hours of work, thereby showing the tendency in LSSP-led strikes to make economic demands in addition to the ever-present demands for redress of grievances against the kanganies. A settlement of the strike—after discussion between the employers and the Estate

²⁰ CO 54/974/7 (Most Secret and Personal) Extract from 'Things Ceylonese', No. 8, 11 April 1940.

Workers' Union represented by N. M. Perera and P. Vellusamy—provided for the recognition of the union in return for the union undertaking that its members on the estates would 'carry out their legitimate duties.' With regard to the grievances against the KP, the management of the estate temple was transferred from the KP to the workers, and the issue of rice, though in charge of the KP, was to be checked by the assistant superintendent and distributed by committee members of the union.

The strike on Wewessa estate in May 1940 was considered by the LSSP leader, Leslie Goonewardena, to be the 'highest point in the entire struggle', where workers 'set up their elected council' (1960: 13). The estate management called the police and an open fight took place between the strikers and the police, resulting in many arrests. Workers were also arrested for having used criminal force on the head kangany. The terms of settlement were that union officials would have the right of entry to the estate if prior notice was given. The head kangany was to be sent away in thirty days, the KPs to be dismissed, estate temples to be run by a committee of workers, the shop run by the head kangany to be abolished and the issue of rice to be supervised by the trade union committee.

VIOLENCE AND MILITANCY

Militancy on the part of the workers and violence directed against them by the police were marked features of LSSP-led protests and strikes. This was particularly so in Uva, where the employers were determined to crush trade unionism, and in this effort had the support of the head kangany and the police. During the Demodera estate strike, the union alleged that workers were severely beaten up by thugs hired by the head kangany. The idea that unions could be handled by beating up the 'ringleaders' on estates was prevalent among some Uva planters, one of whom stated 'the only thing these coolies understand is a good thrashing.'²¹ During the inquiry into the Wewessa strike, the union alleged that workers had been assaulted by the police. This was confirmed by an Uva planter who wrote: 'some of the ringleaders from Wewessa were caught and brought into Badulla ... the police handled coolies very roughly and beat them openly in front of the crowds in the streets.' Another notable case took place on Odoowena estate where arrested strikers 'were taken to Badulla jail, and from all accounts, the yells from the jail could be heard far and wide.'²² During the

²¹ File A/2/40, Letter of George Bolster, 28 May 1940, intercepted by the wartime censor.

²² File A/2/40, Letter of George Bolster, 28 May 1940.

unrest in Uva, the LSSP leaders N. M. Perera and Edmund Samarakkody were also attacked, according to the LSSP, 'by thugs hired by planters.'²³

THE POPE MURDER CASE

A marked feature of the unrest and strikes in 1939 and the first half of 1940 was the violence and disorder accompanied these actions. The government laid the blame for this on the LSSP union leadership, citing the decrease in violence after 18 and 19 June 1940 when the LSSP leaders—Leslie Goonewardena, N. M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva and Edmund Samarakkoddy were taken into custody under the defence regulations. In spite of these restrictions and the attempts by the government to restore negotiations and order, labour unrest continued in some plantation districts, demonstrating the militancy of the workers who had started to take mobilise against what they viewed as abusive labour practices of the planters. In 1941, the killing of George Pope, the superintendent of Stellenberg Estate, Pussellawa alarmed the plantation sector. Pope was in his forties and had arrived on this estate in 1938. In an account of this case, Walter Thalgodapitiya, a former judge, commented on the changing times:

Some of the planters who could not adapt themselves to the changed conditions, and were loath to drop the mantle of the 'herrenvolk' ... looked with dismay and with disgust at the impertinent antics of their 'coolies'. And the inevitable friction was soon generated (A. C. Alles 1977).

Pope had a history of clashes in previous years with some workers belonging to the LSSP union. Moreover, there was serious discontentment about his treatment of workers who were active in the union. As Alles wrote:

Pope was strong and muscular and administered the affairs on Stellenberg with an iron hand. He brooked no gambling on the estate, did not permit any illicit liquor booths and in every way proved himself to be a strict disciplinarian. He was a man of somewhat hasty temper, rather impulsive and liable to take offence more or less easily (1977: 72).

In February 1940, the All Ceylon Estate Workers Union, with headquarters at No. 54, Trincomalee Street, Kandy, established a trade

²³ *Samasamajist*, 21 February 1952.

union on Stellenberg estate, and recruited 300 members. Meiappen, the leader of the workers on Stellenberg, was a committee member of the main union. Alles claimed that

He now fancied himself a person of some consequence on Stellenberg and strutted about the estate with his head high in the air; he had become the champion of the down-trodden labourers, in a position to be able to grant redress for their grievances, genuine and imaginary, and fancied himself the most important person on the estate. With Pope's irascible temper and impulsive nature and Meiappen's newly found importance, trouble commenced brewing on Stellenberg; there was bound to be a clash sooner or later between two persons of such different dispositions and trouble arose sooner than was expected and over a matter which may be considered one of a trivial nature (1977: 72).

It was during the tension on Stellenberg estate, caused by the new union, that the government moved in to curb the LSSP. The first action by the authorities against the LSSP had taken place in May 1940, when the Badulla magistrate issued an order prohibiting the office-bearers and members of the All-Ceylon Estate Workers' Union and the LSSP, from holding any meetings in certain plantation districts, for a period of 14 days.²⁴ This order was openly flouted by the LSSP and a mass meeting attended by over 5,000 plantation workers was held in Badulla. At this meeting, N. M. Perera stated that it was being held in defiance of the authorities and that the leaders of the LSSP were prepared to be arrested, imprisoned or even shot. Perera claimed that the ban against public meetings in Uva was directed only against the LSSP because the other plantation trade unions had not 'created awe and fear in the hearts of estate superintendents, who are only afraid of the Samasamajists.'²⁵

The Planters' Association, urged on by the Uva planters, met the Minister of Labour in May 1940 as unrest and disorder up-country had shown no signs of abating, and there was danger that the LSSP-led strikes would spread to other areas. The activities of the LSSP were also held to be demoralising for the war effort and with the fall of France to Germany in June 1940, the Governor felt that the time had come for repressive action against the party. Using powers given to the Governor under the Emergency Power Order-in-Council, detention orders were

²⁴ *Ceylon Daily News*, 4 May 1940.

²⁵ Labour Dept, File W.105, Police Report of speech of N. M. Perera at a public meeting in Uva.

issued for five main LSSP leaders—N. M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena, Colvin R. de Silva, Edmund Samakkody and Leslie Goonewardene. Writing about the history of the LSSP, Leslie Goonewardene noted that LSSP 'was not caught napping' and while the first four were arrested, he managed to 'evade arrest and went underground' while the 'party press was sealed and guarded.' (1960). In April 1942, the four arrested leaders managed to escape from the jail and go to India for the duration of the war but the LSSP activities in plantation and urban trade unions continued (Goonewardene 1960).

In spite of the detention of the LSSP leadership, the violence on the Stellenberg estate continued. On 9 May 1941, when Pope was returning home alone at night, a group of workers armed with rods waylaid and killed him. Six were arrested and two of the accused, Weerasamy and Velaithan were sentenced to death and hanged. The background to this event was that Weerasamy had been discharged from the estate earlier for assaulting a tea maker but refused to leave and reported the issue to the union. Pope had to reemploy him after the Labour Department intervened, but he retaliated by sacking Meiappen, the union leader, for boasting of this achievement. The union protested and tension increased in early 1941; Pope reinstated Meiappen but did not give him work and then proceeded to charge him with criminal trespass. The whole episode sent shock waves on the estate.

Meiappen appeared in court with Martin Silva, the Estate Workers Union Joint Secretary, and was released on bail. Alles remarks that the workers on Stellenberg were 'seething with anger at the treatment meted out to their leaders':

They felt, probably with justification, that Pope was making every attempt to victimize Meiappen [whose] friends ... were determined that Pope ... be taught a lesson (1977: 76).

The lightning strikes coincided with the involvement of the LSSP union in the plantations, leading to the workers resorting to individual acts of violence

The militancy displayed by the workers during 1939 and 1940 reflected a major breakthrough for the labour movement on the plantations. Both individual workers and their unions challenged the labour regime and attacked the management hierarchy with violence and ferocity, highlighting among other demands, union recognition, increased wages, dissatisfaction with the head kanganyies and other grievances against the estate management. They also defied the social isolation that had been

consciously imposed on them by the planters and undertook joint action with trade unions and political parties from outside the estate sector. The brutality of the response by the police and the planters only worsened unrest and disorder in the plantation region. What made the situation more threatening to the colonial state and the planters was that some workers had allied with the LSSP. The latter, unlike other unions, had a definite leftist ideology that went beyond improvements in wages and was concerned with transforming society in general. In line with some political and labour movements in the British colonies, the LSSP also used anti-imperialist slogans to attack the British government. It did not support the war effort and believed the war could be used to topple colonialism and capitalism. Thus, it was not just the 'Planter Raj' that was threatened, but the future of the British Raj itself.

These different processes, individually and cumulatively, became more critical for Britain during wartime. It was opportune, therefore, for a qualitatively different approach to deal with the demands of the workers and their organisations. The colonial government in London and Ceylon, and even some of the planters found it necessary to think seriously about containing the labour unrest through negotiation and regulations. What occurred was, in essence, as discussed in the following chapter, a volte face in the industrial relations system on the plantations as the British state, the colonial government (including the local ministers) and the Planters' Association were forced by circumstances to pursue totally new policies towards the workers. But these changes did not occur without opposition and debate and reflected attitudes and practices among some planters that were reminiscent of the nineteenth century.

I feel there are many planters in the backwoods who require convincing ... I say without hesitation that propaganda as to the meaning, objects and influence of Trade-unions is much more necessary and urgent amongst planters than amongst labourers ... if only all planters would understand the true meaning of the Trade-unions then the less chance self-seeking agitators would have of leading gullible labourers astray, and the more the Trade-unions would be helped and guided along the right lines.

H. J. Temple, a leading planter of the period
(Planters' Association Files. Meeting of General Committee of
Planters Association, 19 July 1940).

The spread of anti-imperialist struggles as well as pressure from progressive sections of the Labour Party to promote self-government and social welfare in the colonies assumed greater strategic significance with the involvement of Britain in the Second World War in September 1939. Under these pressures, Colonial Office policy on labour became linked to appeasing labour unrest through trade union recognition and collective bargaining mechanisms. The Ceylon government was forced to develop new structures to deal with labour disputes on the plantations and the planters were forced to negotiate with workers' representatives on issues such as wages and on conditions of work. But while some planters viewed such changes as necessary, there were others who opposed these plans and raised arguments that favoured harsh and punitive practices rather than negotiation of workers' organisations and tripartite agreements. The institutionalisation of modern trade unionism on the plantations was thus the enforced outcome of these different confrontations and processes.

MALCOLM MACDONALD AND THE POLICIES OF RECONCILIATION

One important development that influenced labour relations in the colonies was the appointment from late 1935 to 1938 of a new Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Malcolm MacDonald. He was the son of Ramsey MacDonald, the first Labour Party Prime Minister of Britain and Margaret Gladstone MacDonald, a feminist and Labour Party activist. Malcolm MacDonald (1901–1981) was a Labour member of parliament, known for his support for self-government in the colonies.¹ The 1930s had been a period that witnessed the development of anti-imperialist movements and labour unrest, and the Colonial Office became increasingly aware that these protests could not be repressed but had to be addressed by new methods, including the adoption of a more conciliatory attitude to the demands raised by labour. During a Colonial Office vote in the House of Commons, several members of parliament expressed concern and interest in the conditions of workers in the colonies, resulting, by 1935, in a major shift in Colonial Office policy regarding labour in the colonies.

Influenced by the more progressive forces in the Labour Party, Malcolm MacDonald sent a despatch to colonial governors in 1935, where he stressed the need for 'regular supervision of the conditions of ... employment ... observation of the laws and regulations relating to labour contracts, housing and sanitary arrangement and hospital facilities', adding that he was 'unable to regard as satisfactory a system under which the machinery of Government is involved only to the extent of investigating complaints.'² This was the continuation of the policy of the Labour Party stalwart Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb) who had served as Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs under the Labour Government headed by Ramsey MacDonald. Lord Passfield was sympathetic to the development of trade unions as a means of improving the rights of workers, and with his wife Beatrice, he had written the pioneering book *History of Trade Unionism* (1894).³ But

¹ A biography titled *Malcolm MacDonald Bringing an End to Empire* (1995) by Clyde Sanger analyses his role in the decolonising process.

² SLNA, File 0/143/1937. Circular Despatch of 9 November 1935.

³ After the violent urban strike of the tramway drivers in Colombo in 1929, the Ceylon government had proposed four new pieces of legislation involving the workers. These included a Trade Disputes Ordinance to prevent lightning strikes, a Trade Union Ordinance compelling registration of unions, a Trade Disputes Conciliation Ordinance outlying the procedures for settling labour disputes, and the Minimum Wage Legislation. Lord Passfield, however, only allowed the Minimum Wages Ordinance, considering the others to be reactionary.

Malcolm MacDonald's policy went beyond trade unionism and took on a more socialist approach in colonial development with increasing emphasis on improving the conditions of the working people.

Reference was made to the financial improvement in the colonies after the economic depression of the early thirties, and MacDonald declared that it was only right that 'colonial governments take all steps in their power to ensure that a fair share of this benefit is passed on to the workers.'⁴ The key section of the despatch also emphasised the need to recognise trade unions in order to avoid political unrest:

it should be realised that prohibition of trade unions or the subjection of them to disabilities ... is almost certain to encourage the formation of illegal organisations which may easily develop into 'secret societies' and extend their operations into the political field.

It added that a policy of restriction in this respect may therefore 'give direct encouragement to the formation of extremist associations.' This despatch stated that the relations between master and servant are 'equally important in a purely agricultural colony' as in industrial areas, and that labour departments with officials whose duty was to 'inspect and examine labour conditions generally' were a necessity in the colonies. The need for workmen's compensation, higher wages, improved workers' housing (especially on plantations), and better educational facilities were mentioned.⁵

Serious labour unrest in 1937 in Barbados, Trinidad and Mauritius led Malcolm MacDonald as the Secretary of State to send out an important despatch in September 1938, stressing the political dangers that could arise from labour discontent:

Far-reaching changes in the economic and social sphere are being widely felt through the Colonial Empire. The conditions of life today made it likely that these developments will again increase in momentum, and if we are to guide them wisely they will call for all the vision and statesmanship which we can command. They are bringing to their train potential causes of friction between employers and workers which, if not properly handled, may lead to acute disturbances in the political and economic structure.⁶

⁴ SLNA, File 0/143/1937, Circular Despatch of 9 November 1935.

⁵ SLNA, File 0/143/1937, Circular Despatch of 9 November 1935.

⁶ SLNA, File 0/143/1937, Circular Dispatch of 5.9.1938 from the Secretary of State for Dominions.

While deliberations had taken place on the timing and form of these policies, the involvement of Britain in the Second World War from September 1939, forced the Colonial Office to intervene urgently in labour relations in Ceylon. The island was strategically located in the Indian Ocean with the serious possibility that Japanese military advances could occupy it. Reflecting these concerns, the Secretary of State remarked in another despatch in 1939 that since the economic dislocation caused by the war might lead to industrial disputes, it was necessary for the colonial government 'to ensure that relations between employees and workers are maintained in as harmonious an atmosphere as possible.'⁷

LABOUR POLICY OF THE CEYLON GOVERNMENT

The Board of Ministers in the 1930s was composed of Ceylonese Ministers elected by the various committees in the State Council. As there was no collective cabinet responsibility, policies followed in any ministry were often influenced by the personality of the individual minister. When trade unions began on the plantations, the Minister of Labour was G. C. S. (Claude) Corea of Chilaw, a graduate of Oxford University, who on his return had joined the Ceylon National Congress. Corea, a nephew of the early nationalists C. E. and Victor Corea, had also been associated with several radical groups including the Progressive Nationalist Party formed by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in 1926, A. E. Goonesinha's Labour Party and also the Youth League movement in 1931. He was elected to the Chilaw seat in the State Council and was appointed Minister of Labour in 1936. The Minister was in agreement with the Colonial Office policy on the need to act with moderation towards trade unions and to prevent violent labour unrest from becoming a political threat to the country. Under the Minister's influence, the Board of Ministers in the State Council recognised that it was necessary to adopt a 'realistic' approach to the growth of trade unions. This approach involved the recognition of collective bargaining and trade union representation in management-labour relations and established, clear rules and procedures to be followed in case of differences or labour disputes.

In line with the instructions from the Colonial Office, the Ceylon government established a Labour Department headed by a Controller of Labour who during the years 1939-40 was Frank Gimson, a University

⁷ Circular of 15 December 1939 from the Secretary of State to the Governor of Ceylon.

of Oxford graduate who had entered the Ceylon Civil Service in 1914. Gimson was familiar with difficult conditions under which some of the local people lived as he had been Government Agent of Kegalle, one of the worst-affected areas during the severe malaria epidemic of 1934 in Ceylon where he had worked closely with the young radicals of the Youth League in providing relief, and had praised their work. Subsequently, as Controller of Labour, he was in charge of the department during the crucial periods of labour unrest in the plantations. Gimson closely followed the policy directives of the Colonial Office with regard to labour. He also enlarged the Labour Department and initiated the policy of appointing Ceylonese individuals as Assistant Controllers of Labour, choosing candidates for their 'imaginative outlook in dealing with labour unrest.'⁸ Gimson, who was later the Colonial Secretary in Hong Kong, was interned by the Japanese during the Second World War, after which he was appointed Governor of Singapore.

In 1939, Gimson himself made an important Statement of Policy, reflecting the Colonial Office policy on labour in the colonies. In a letter to the chairman of the Planters' Association, he stated that estate superintendents should deal directly with complaints made by workers so as to 'make their labour force feel that their employers had their welfare at heart' and urged the planters not only to interest themselves in attempts by labour to form societies on plantations, but also by 'careful guidance' to direct the activities of these societies into 'channels which would prevent unrest and disorder.'⁹ The Secretary of State approved Gimson's letter and said it should serve as a model to be followed in other colonies.

DIVISIONS AMONG PLANTERS

The planters, however, were divided on the issue of trade unions and industrial relations on estates. Almost all of the tea and most of the rubber planters in Sri Lanka in 1939 were British, a great proportion being Scots. There were a few proprietary planters who had inherited estates, but companies, employing British superintendents and assistant superintendents, owned the majority of estates. The interests of the planting community were represented by three main organisations, of

⁸ Sir Frank Gimson to Kumari Jayawardena, personal communication, Pickering, Yorkshire, January 1963.

⁹ Labour Dept File T. 19. Letter of Controller of Labour of 10 October 1939.

which the Planters' Association Ceylon (PA) was the most important.¹⁰ The discussions, as detailed below, reflected not only the tensions between the planters and the Ceylon government but also that many planters were simply not prepared to do away with what they viewed as time-tested if severe methods of labour control.

One section of the planters believed that repressive measures were the only way to deal with trade unions, while others held that more conciliatory tactics produced better results. In many cases, those planters who took orders from London were handicapped by their lack of power to negotiate. In the words of the Frank Gimson, former Controller of Labour, 'Directors [of tea companies] in London had out-dated experience in Ceylon of a tranquil labour force. Labour unrest was to the Directors, a sign of inefficiency.'¹¹ During the crucial years 1939–40, the president of the Planters' Association was Robert C. Scott, a proprietary planter and therefore not responsible to a London company. He had realistic views on trade union questions and believed in conciliation rather than repression. Influenced by this 'moderate' wing of planter opinion, several memoranda and pamphlets were issued by the Planters' Association, and sent to estate superintendents, instructing them on ways of effectively dealing with labour unrest.

The approach of the more moderate planters was based on Colonial Office policy and the realisation that under war conditions, the planting industry had at all costs to avoid labour troubles which could cause not only political unrest but also the economic dislocation of the tea and rubber industries. The Planters' Association issued several important statements of policy. In November 1939, when labour unrest had spread fairly widely, a confidential circular was sent to the Chairmen of District Planters' Associations containing three documents (Files of the Planters Association 1939–40). First, was the Controller of Labour's letter of October 1939, which indicated the Colonial Office approach to the labour unrest. The second was a letter from the Secretary of the Planters' Association, which drew a distinction between 'organized unrest ... engineered by unscrupulous politicians' and 'unrest due to injustice of

¹⁰ The proprietary planters had their own organisation, the Ceylon Estates Proprietary Association (CEPA), formed in 1921, which although an independent body, cooperated with the Planters' Associations on matters of vital interests to planters. The Ceylon Association in London was formed in 1888 to act as agents in Britain for the Planters' Association. This body looked after the interests of the planting industry, and acted as its spokesman whenever questions affecting the tea and rubber industries had to be placed before the British government.

¹¹ Personal Communication to Kumari Jayawardena from Sir Frank Gimson, from Pickering, Yorkshire, January 1963.

lack of understanding', caused by insufficient acquaintance with the labour force, the 'unsettling influence of a bad Head Kangany, rigid and irksome discipline, lack of amenities, precipitate dismissals of workers' and 'machinations of unscrupulous members of the subordinate staff.'

The third document was a letter from R. C. Scott, Chairman of the PA, stating that though his observations would be 'very unpalatable and perhaps be intolerantly received by many employers', it was futile 'to deny that labourers are becoming politically minded and are absorbing Western ideas of thought and action, in an elementary manner perhaps, but at a rapid pace.' He wrote that he was seriously perturbed at the 'precipitate and unsympathetic action of employers', such as refusing permission for unions to be formed or meetings to be held, and dismissing workers who were active unionists. Scott added that he also thought the 'lack of knowledge of Tamil by the majority of planters was a major weakness' (Files of the Planters Association 1939-40).

By December 1939, the deterioration in the situation led to the Planters' Association issuing a memorandum of procedure for estate superintendents and a pamphlet entitled 'Labour Unrest', which contained extracts from the Secretary of State's declaration on colonial labour in 1939. By April 1940, when there was an aggravation of labour agitation, planters' organisations sent a memorandum on labour unrest to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. This document alleged that the trade unions were motivated by financial gain, and intimidation had become 'increasingly intense', strikes were being called 'on the most superficial pretexts', and that the workers were subject to 'unscrupulous propaganda and skilfully worded pamphlets against which the Police are unable to take action' (Files of the Planters Association 1939-40).

A considerable section of planter opinion held the view that a policy of conciliation was a sign of weakness and advocated that strong repressive action should be taken to combat trade unionism on plantations. This group was in constant conflict with the Controller of Labour and officials of the Labour Department. They were unwilling to regard the trade union movement as anything but the work of political agitators who were spreading sedition and insubordination among a previously contented labour force. What was more, some planters were quite willing to resort to extra-legal methods of combating trade unionism, for as one of them remarked, 'There is too much at stake. Our lives and millions of pounds worth of valuable property. If the Police cannot act, we'll do the job for them by ignoring the regulations.'¹² Ethnic divisions were also cynically

¹² National Archives File A/2/40, letter of George Bolster, 28 May 1940.

used by the planters in controlling the labour force through violence. As one planter wrote in May 1940

Several coolies tried to cause trouble but got nowhere. The Head Kangany arranged for a very rude cooly who caused the trouble to be beaten. A big Sinhala tough was tipped the wink ... and he gave the cooly a good hammering ... Having Sinhalese on the estate is very useful for they are keen on beating up an impertinent Tamil. The only thing these coolies understand is a good thrashing when they get out of hand.¹³

The attitude of the 'dichard' planters was also well reflected in their clash with the new Governor, Sir Andrew Caldecott, who in 1937 had succeeded Sir Edward Reginald Stubbs, an old-style imperialist. Caldecott (1884–1951), who had studied at Oxford, had spent several years as a civil servant in Malaya and was subsequently appointed as Governor of Hong Kong where he was renowned for his diplomacy in reconciling different ethnic groups.

The new appointment was intended to reflect a change in approach, for Governor Stubbs had during his term of office alienated the local ministers, supported the more conservative planters and used an obsolete law to secure the deportation of the LSSP-linked planter M.A. Bracegirdle, thereby precipitating a political crisis. Governor Caldecott had the task of repairing much of the damage caused by his predecessor and he went out of his way to play the role of a sympathetic governor. Caldecott was not only able to work well with local leaders but he also supported the Ceylonese ministers in their demand for a cabinet system of government but favouring the retention of the Governor's powers. On labour questions, Caldecott followed the Colonial Office policy. Sir Thomas Villiers, one of the best known planters of the day, expressed the fears of the planters in August 1939 that the new Governor, unlike his predecessor, was unsympathetic towards planter interests. Writing on this question, he quoted Caldecott as having said that, it was not his conception of the Governor's role under the constitution that he should talk policy with anyone except the ministers. Villiers commented that

as the Ministers are all low-country Sinhalese, he therefore receives no expression of opinion from the Europeans, the Kandyans, the Jaffna Tamil or any Indian. I also hear that he never consults his Chief Secretary even, so that he hears one side and one side only of the many problems

¹³ Letter of George Bolster, 28 May 1940.

that confront him. *This confirms me in my opinion that the days when any responsible body such as the Chamber of Commerce or Planters' Association could discuss matters freely with the Governor are past and over.*¹⁴

In December 1939 a deputation of planters submitted a memorandum on labour unrest to the Governor and in an interview asked for government action to curb the activities of the trade unions. Complaints were made of the intimidation of workers, the breakdown of discipline and of unscrupulous agitators who were distributing 'subversive propaganda pamphlets' and 'inflaming the minds of illiterate Tamil labourers' by going from estate to estate at night, 'holding secret meetings and inciting labour to behave in a way quite foreign to the nature of Tamils we have known in the past.' In reply, the Governor told the planters that labour unrest was a world problem, that in Sri Lanka it was due to 'a sudden awakening of democratic consciousness as a result of the grant of universal suffrage' and that circumstances had changed so radically that the planters would have to 're-orientate their outlook.' Any action such as proclaiming martial law, or amending the penal code, he said would cause a political crisis. The planters' suggestion that trade union agitators be repatriated to India was also rejected by the Governor on the grounds that it would lead to further strikes and the interference of the Indian National Congress.¹⁵ The Governor was later to note that it was 'instructive' to find that most of the unrest was centred in the districts where the planters were 'notoriously diehard.'¹⁶

Resentment against the Governor by planters increased with the spread of strikes and labour unrest organised by the LSSP, which caused alarm and were seen as a dangerous threat to their interests. The violence, disorder, and clashes with the police, which characterised some of the militant strikes of the LSSP union, together with their 'seditious' and 'provocative' speeches denouncing the British and the war effort, made the planters more frustrated than ever at the Governor's 'inactivity' (see Chapter 10). Some of the most reactionary of the Uva planters, in their letters to their families in Britain, vented their anger against Governor Caldecott. One planter, named C. Davidson, wrote: 'He is hated by all the English here, lets a native get away with murdering a white family and would clap a European in jail if he touched a native ...

¹⁴ Labour Department File A/2/40, emphasis added.

¹⁵ Labour Department File A/2/40, Report of Interview with the Governor, 22 December 1939.

¹⁶ CO/54/974/7, Governor's Report No. 7, 'Things Ceylonese', 21 March 1940.

of course the coolie knows it and runs riot.¹⁷ Another planter, George Bolster, called the Governor

the world's prize bloody fool ... he is really the weakest kidneyed specimen of the human race that one can imagine. The only thing that might wake him up would be if a hundred planters went down to Queen's House, kicked up a real row inside and outside ... carried him to the jetty and immersed him in the harbour's oily waters and let him swim for it.¹⁸

THE SEVEN-POINT AGREEMENT

These deliberations and negotiations between the planters and the colonial government were interrupted by militant strikes that shook the plantation sector in 1939 and 1940 (see Chapter 12). In 1941, the Secretary for State for the Colonies sent his Labour Advisor, Major Granville Orde Brown to investigate the conditions of labour in Mauritius, Ceylon and Malaya. His report, which was published in 1943, recommended the introduction of legislation to improve the conditions of the workers. Determined to deal with these increasing threats to the stability of the country, the government endorsed a Seven-Point Agreement between planting interests and the trade unions in 1940, which was followed in 1941 by the Minimum Wages Ordinance.

The Seven-Point Agreement was the second such collective agreement in Ceylon, the first being eleven years earlier in 1929, between the Employers Federation and the Ceylon Labour Union, the urban trade union led by A. E. Goonesinha. Under the Seven-Point Agreement, signed by the representatives of three planters' organisations and three unions—the Ceylon Indian Congress, All Ceylon Estate Workers Federation (LSSP) and the Ceylon Indian Workers Federation—the planters' organisations recognised the right of workers to form trade unions, and agreed to negotiate with registered trade unions. On their part, the unions agreed that when a dispute arose, the union would submit the demands of the workers to the plantation management 'before any action by way of strike or otherwise was taken. The agreement also dealt with secondary questions, such as notice to quit and its implications, the establishment of conciliation boards and the role of the Labour

¹⁷ Labour Department File A/2/40, Letter of C. Davidson, 20 April 1940, intercepted by wartime censor.

¹⁸ Labour Department File A/2/40, Letter of George Bolster, 28 April 1940, intercepted by wartime censor.

Department. Although much was made of the Seven-Point Agreement between unions and the management, it merely recognised the workers' right to unionise—another step in giving the plantation workers a right already achieved in the urban sector.

A section of the planters, however, objected to the manner in which the Planters' Association had concluded the Seven-Point Agreement. But H. J. Parfitt, a nominated member of the State Council, said that there would have been a dangerous delay if the agreement had been held up while both the Planters' Association and the trade unions consulted their members. He said:

At this time our labour troubles were getting worse ... and the position was most delicate. We representatives therefore did agree to that tentative agreement to recognize trade-unionism ... we did it, rightly or wrongly, but we always had in view the well being of the Tea and Rubber Industry.¹⁹

There was also opposition to the Agreement on the ground that it provided for the recognition of trade unions that were indulging in political and seditious activities. The Planters' Association, during their discussion on the Agreement, had not succeeded in persuading the Minister to add a clause stating that only those unions that were not inimical to law and order could be recognised. In criticising this aspect of the agreement, D. E. Hamilton, an Uva planter, made a strong protest concerning the LSSP-led unions:

While negotiations were proceeding and our representatives were being appeased, and the Minister was being convinced that incitement to violence could no longer be laid at the door of any Union, representatives of one of the Unions were distributing literature saying 'Awake, people of Ceylon, ring the death knell of British Imperialism, rally under the red flag, come fully armed with sticks and fight to release your unfortunate leaders.'²⁰

Since many of planters were apprehensive about the agreement, the Planters' Association and the Ceylon Estates Proprietary Association sent a long memorandum addressed to all superintendents of estates, emphasising the importance of the Seven-Point Agreement which they realised was in their own interests. This document was a cleverly worded emotional appeal, in which the war, democracy and the ideals

¹⁹ Planters' Association Files. Meeting of General Committee of Planters Association, 19 July 1940.

²⁰ File A/2/40, Labour Department, Colombo.

of the Empire were linked with the need to recognise trade unions. The 'suspicions or prejudice' of some superintendents were compared to the attitudes of employers in Britain during the early years of trade unionism. The point stressed was that, just as the British trade union movement gained experience and a 'sense of responsibility' and was today 'in the front rank of loyalty' towards the war effort in Britain, Ceylon too would overcome the 'growing pains' of labour unrest. To the criticism that some of the local trade union leaders were not loyal, reference was made to a prominent British socialist leader who had wanted to see a 'To Let' sign on Buckingham Palace but later became a minister and a most loyal subject. On the question of Communists, the memorandum declared, 'There is a Communist Party in England ... its leaders are prominent trade unionists ... the loyalty of the Unions to the King or to agreement with employers had in no way been compromised.' Similarly, it was claimed that the LSSP signatory to the Seven-Point Agreement, though 'a Communist politician', had voluntarily agreed to the agreement.

The Planters' Association officials and the more farsighted planters also defended the Seven-Point Agreement. H. J. Temple, a leading planter, emphasised the fact that the agreement was the most vital issue the planters had ever faced, and said that it brought together the employers and the unions in a manner that had not been achieved even in Britain: 'We have had the trade union movement for about eighteen months on estates and we shall have made history if in this short time we can secure the operation of the agreement by both capital and labour.' He stated that the planters should have no hesitation in accepting the agreement, as it was beneficial to them:

The Agreement provides that we recognise Trade-unions. We have got to do that by law without any Agreements. It provides one thing we all want—the prevention of the lightning strikes; it provides for the written submissions of details of a dispute, and it provides for their calm and judicial examination, and if a Trade-union does not keep its word its leaders are liable to criminal prosecution. What more do we want?²¹

If the agreement was not accepted, Temple said, the whole industry would lose. He pointed out that by recognising unions, 'you will be able to exercise some influence in moderating the extravagant uneconomic ideas that inexperienced Trade-union Leaders may have.' Temple also

²¹ Planters' Association Files. Meeting of General Committee of Planters Association, 19 July 1940.

attacked the group of planters 'in the backwoods' who were against any recognition being given to unions.

Frank Gimson's 'Statement of Policy' also urged planters not to prevent workers from joining registered unions but added that the right of entry into estates for the purpose of addressing meetings or collecting subscriptions for the union could only be given with the written permission of the superintendent. The unions objected to this but the Planters' Association replied that the estates were private property and the right of refusal of entry to outsiders could not be waived, but if 'reasonable requests' were made in writing by 'duly accredited representatives of trade-unions', permission was unlikely to be refused.²²

The Seven-Point Agreement produced immediate results and from August 1940, there was a marked reduction in strikes and labour unrest because of its effective working. The Controller of Labour reported two months after the signing, that 'the principles enunciated in the Seven-Point Agreement have promoted the conduct of negotiations between Superintendents and labour leaders, and have enabled settlements to be effected in a more generous spirit than hitherto.'²³

THE WAGES BOARD ORDINANCE OF 1941

After the outbreak of the Second World War, which accelerated a trade revival and a sharp rise in the cost of living, the government introduced a Wages Board Bill in 1941. The Minister of Labour, in presenting the Bill in the State Council, said it had been long delayed but was intended to fill a 'clear omission' in the legislation of Ceylon and would ensure the workers, who had hitherto been exploited, 'proper wages and reasonable hours of work.'²⁴ The Bill was overwhelmingly supported in the State Council. George E. de Silva, who had been associated with the urban labour movement, spoke of the neglect of the worker and the shirking of responsibility by the government, for which 'we cannot offer any kind of legitimate defence.'²⁵ I. X. Pereira, the Indian nominated member, welcomed the ordinance to regulate wages of workers in all trades.²⁶

²² File PL/2/36, letter to the Minister of Labour from Planters' Association, 13 November 1940.

²³ CGA File, A/2/40, Memorandum of Controller of Labour, 10 October 1940.

²⁴ *Hansard* 1941.

²⁵ *Hansard* 1941.

²⁶ *Hansard* 1941.

The object of the legislation was 'to secure the amelioration of the conditions of work (including wages) of persons employed in all trades, including in that term any industry, business, undertaking, occupation, profession or calling in which the relationship of employer and worker exists.'²⁷ Part I of the ordinance stated that every employer had to pay wages directly to the worker, without deductions, except for certain authorised deductions for advances on wages, rice, clothes, etc., which were not to exceed 50 per cent of wages due, or 75 per cent in the tea and rubber trades. This part of the ordinance came into force in September 1941.

The Wages Board Ordinance aroused misgivings among planters. The Planters' Association feared that the bill would be a further burden on the planting industry. The practice of making deductions from wages, including the fining of workers, which was widely resorted to by employers, had always been a source of keen resentment among both urban and plantation labour. Plantation employers had always provided rice for the workers and deducted its cost from their wages. In most cases, the rice was supplied at less than the market price. Workers also bought other essentials from the estate shop on credit, the amounts being deducted from their wages at the end of the month. Other services such as barbering and laundry were operated on a similar basis. The trade unions opposed the practice of deductions from wages not only on the grounds that the 'truck' system was objectionable but also because they felt that illiterate workers, unable to keep an accurate check on their accounts, would be exposed to malpractices. The unions had long advocated a policy of higher wages to replace the customary practice of the employers providing subsidised rice to the workers.

The system of fining workers for bad conduct or unsatisfactory work was an even stronger cause for discontent. On plantations, fines were imposed for certain offences connected with work, such as negligence, 'slacking,' absence without sufficient cause, and damaging property. Offences concerning 'conduct' included 'disobedience', insubordination, petty theft, rows and drunkenness. The trade union activities of the workers were controlled by the imposition of fines for the distribution or exhibition of handbills, pamphlets or posters without the sanction of the management. Fines could therefore be made for a variety of reasons and for offences that were sometimes hard to define, such as 'slacking' and 'insubordination.' It is not surprising that fines were inevitably regarded as an unfair form of wage reduction and that there was considerable

²⁷ Wages Board Ordinance of 1941.

pressure in later years from the trade unions for the discontinuance of the practice.

Wages boards were welcomed by the trade unions but the ordinance came in for a good deal of criticism from the employers. The British planting interests objected to the provisions regarding deductions from wages and paid holidays and the Minister's power of appointments to the boards. They were supported by Ceylonese organisations, including the Sinhalese Merchants' Chamber, which stated that the system of fining workers was acceptable all over the world and if disallowed by the Ordinance would adversely affect discipline. A ten-hour maximum working day instead of the nine hours prescribed by the ordinance was advocated, and objection was made to the provisions that compelled attendance and the production of documents at wages boards inquiries. It was, the planters felt, a most inopportune time for social legislation, which should be postponed. The Low-Country Planters' Association also sent a memorandum to the government stating that any interference with agriculture would be prejudicial to production.

The two most important trade unions in the island at that time, the Ceylon Indian Congress Labour Union and the Ceylon Trade Union Federation, accepted the ordinance and agreed to cooperate in its working. The CIC Labour Union held that any deductions from wages was undesirable and that paid holidays should be made compulsory by the Wages Boards instead of being a matter of discretion. The union also asked that the Executive Committee for Labour in the State Council be given the power to fix wages if the wages board did not arrive at a decision.

The early 1940s thus formed a watershed in the establishment of industrial relations on the estates. All the four parties, the workers' representatives, the employers' associations, as well as the British government and Ceylonese politicians were involved in negotiating conditions of work and settling labour disputes. And, not for the first time, Labour Party members of parliament and liberal individuals in Britain influenced Colonial Office policies. The Secretary of State for the Dominions (MacDonald) was able to get support from local bureaucrats (Gimson) and also team up with the Minister of Labour (Corea), the Governor (Caldecott), all Oxonian liberals and the moderates among the planters (Scott), in order to overrule the hardline planters and establish a semblance of industrial peace after the turmoil of 1939-40.

By institutionalising industrial relations on the Ceylon plantations in 1940, the Government of Ceylon recognised the formal role that

workers' representatives and employers had in dealing with plantation labour disputes. It was also an important step in removing labour relations from the realm and dictates of the planters, as it had been for most of plantation history, and bringing it within government scrutiny and control. Such a strategy by the government was also effective in containing labour unrest, and more particularly, the militancy that had characterised plantation workers' protests of previous years.

Workers' Militancy in the Pre-Independence Period

To treat labourers like cattle by inducing them to work by providing them with houses and when they were not wanted to tell them to go elsewhere—just anywhere—was inconsistent with the idea of freedom.

H. V. Perera, King's Council, *Times of Ceylon*, 20 August 1946.

The colonial government had managed to contain the labour unrest that had erupted on the plantations in 1939 and 1940 by setting up regulations and procedures to deal with the disputes between the workers and the management. In the mean time, the official recognition of unions by the Collective Agreement of 1940 led to a dramatic increase in their membership. But this period of relative industrial peace was abruptly disrupted after the end of the war in May 1945, when the country witnessed, between 1946 and 1947, one of the greatest upsurges of urban industrial unrest in the history of the labour movement in Ceylon. The economic uncertainties of the post-war years and the restraints on labour activity during the war were partially responsible for the outburst, but the main factors were the political tensions of the last years of colonial rule in Ceylon. Strike action also spread to the plantations and an intensification of anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist slogans occurred with the return of the LSSP leaders from India in 1945. These actions led to the abrogation of the Seven-Point Agreement by planters and another period of labour unrest. The net impact of these different influences was increased militancy amongst the plantation workers. Labour rights were linked with political entitlements, a feature that was to characterise trade unionism even after independence in 1948.

GROWTH OF UNIONISM

The Ceylon Indian Congress had been formed as the outcome of Jawaharlal Nehru's visit in 1939, when on his advice, sixteen Colombo associations of Indians came together to work together for the interests of Indians in the country. Its first president was Letchumanan Chettiar who was followed by Peri Sunderam who held the post from September 1940 till 1942. Peri Sunderam was a seasoned politician who had won the Hatton seat in the general elections of 1931 and had been the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce in the new State Council. It was under his leadership that the Ceylon Indian Congress Labour Union (CICLU) was inaugurated in 1941 and in a short time it became the dominant trade union among plantation workers. The spectacular increase in the CIC Labour Union membership in the 1940s can be seen in Table 14.1.

**TABLE 14.1: TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP.
1940-47**

Year	CIC Labour Union
1940-41	96,000
1941-42	68,000
1942-43	52,000
1943-44	62,000
1944-45	42,000
1945-46	108,000
1946-47	117,000

Source: Administration Reports of Controller of Labour, 1940-47.

This increase in numbers was also partially associated with the arrest of the LSSP leaders in 1940. The party was banned in 1942, after which the LSSP union had its registration cancelled, ceasing to be active in plantation areas. The Ceylon Indian Workers' Federation led by Natesa Aiyar had declined in influence because of its lack of organisation and its dependence on the energies of a single individual, and its registered membership fell from 37,000 in 1940-41 to 770 in 1944-45. There were no further returns filed and its certification was cancelled in 1946-47.¹ In contrast, the CIC union achieved a spectacular membership of 96,000 in the first year of its existence, a figure that trailed off during the war and revived again in the post-war boom in labour activity.

¹ *Administration Report of Controller of Labour, 1940-47.*

This was also the period of the nationalist struggles in India and many leaders of the CIC and its union were influenced by Gandhi's strategy of nonviolence, particularly after his visit to Sri Lanka in 1927. One of these was K. Rajalingam, who was born on Sanquar Estate in 1909 and who, as part of the chief supervisor's family, studied on the estate. He completed his higher education in Gampola and Kandy and returned as a Tamil teacher to the Sanquar school. He was so moved by Gandhi's ideas that he took up wearing khadi and upholding social justice and unity and was often referred to as 'Malaiaha Gandhi' (P. P. Devaraj, personal communication, 10 March 2014). In 1932, he set up a night school at Savukkumalai estate. He was involved in the office administration of the CIC during the initial period and held the post of president of the CIC from 1948 to 1950.²

The confidence that the CIC Labour Union had acquired by its official recognition under the Seven-Point Agreement led to the development of a militant spirit of trade unionism. It acquired a new mood of defiance when Abdul Aziz took over as president from 1942 to 1945, giving the CIC a leftist approach to politics and trade union affairs. Aziz (1912–90) was the son of Gulamhussein Reimoo, a Khoja Muslim from Gujarat who had migrated to Colombo and established the firm Reimoo & Sons, the agents for Usha, the popular Indian fan brand. Aziz was schooled in Karachi and went to university in Bombay where he graduated in commerce and was involved in student politics. He also developed links with Indian socialists. Arriving in Ceylon in the 1930s, he joined the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC).

Aziz also established links with the Communist Party (CP) in Colombo. Unlike the LSSP, the CP had not been banned as the Soviet Union had entered the war, and the local Communist Party supported the war effort. Aziz appeared at May Day meetings organised by the communist-led Ceylon Trade Union Federation, and was also a committee member of the 'Friends of the Soviet Union.' At the annual sessions of the CIC in 1943, a resolution was passed congratulating the Soviet armies and the people of the Soviet Union 'who by their single handed and heroic achievements have demonstrated the intrinsic superiority of the socialist system.'³ Aziz was also a key figure in the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (Aziz 1986). In 1943, he made anti-British statements at the CIC Labour Union's annual sessions, which led to his prosecution for sedition and subsequent acquittal. He was defended by S. Nadesan (later Queen's Counsel—QC) and the trial became a much publicised event, adding to Aziz's popularity among the estate workers.

² He was to be President from 1951–52 and once again in 1953.

³ Labour Department, File T19, Report of the CIC. Sessions 13 March 1943.

By the mid-1940s, thousands of workers openly proclaimed their allegiance to the CIC Union. Active unionists wore military-style khaki uniforms, and went on demonstrations and processions carrying the CIC flags while also distributing anti-British literature. The district representatives of the CIC had also boldly showed their hostility to planters; CIC office-bearers, including its president, Aziz, were involved in constant disputes with planters and the government. In 1945 Aziz stepped down from the CIC presidency and the leadership was taken over briefly by Peri Sunderam in 1945. S. Thondaman became the president of the CIC during the crucial years of transition to Independence, and held this office from 1946 to 1948.

Savumiamoorthy Thondaman (1913–99), was the son of Karuppiah of Ramnad, Tamil Nadu who came to Ceylon in 1873. He born in 1913 and at the age of thirteen, found work on coffee estates at 13 cents a day. By 1890, Karuppiah, who had worked on several estates, became a kangany on Wavendon Estate in Ramboda, and with credit obtained from Chettiars, bought the estate in 1909. In 1924, his son Savumiamoorthy Thondaman also came to Ceylon and attended an estate school and then St Andrew's College, Gampola for five years up to 1932. Thondaman wrote his father that he owned a large acreage of tea in an area regarded as a piece of real estate created by God for the *white man* (Thondaman 1987: 8 emphasis in the original). In his autobiography Thondaman emphasised how inspired he was when at the age of fourteen he listened Mahatma Gandhi's talk on freedom and swadeshi during his visit to Ceylon in November 1927. Since that time, he only wore khaddar (1987: xii). As he noted in his autobiography:

Mahatma Gandhi has been and is still my political guru. His theory and practice of non-violence became the core of my political ideology. His approach to social problems and social justice, especially the fight against caste, the struggle for the emancipation of women and for total religious freedom and tolerance, became my guide to action (Thondaman 1987: xvii).

He began his political career in 1940 in the Ceylon Indian Congress, and in a short time had become not only its president, but also the leader of the labour union. In 1945, most of the strikes on plantation were lightning strikes connected with the dismissal of workers. During that same year, the ban was lifted on the LSSP. Its leaders, who had escaped to India, returned to Ceylon and revived the LSSP's All-Ceylon Estate Workers Union. Three political parties emerged from the doctrinal differences



FIGURE 14.1

From left to right, C. V. Velupillai, Abdul Aziz, S. Thondaman and K. Rajalingam, with other satyagrahis.

Source: Muthiah (2003).

among the Marxists. There were two Trotskyist parties—the LSSP and a new breakaway group the BLP (Bolshevik Leninist Party)—and the Communist Party of Ceylon (CP), which had been formed in 1943. The CP began a new union on plantations, the Ceylon Workers Union. A post-war increase in strikes on plantations occurred in 1946, when the tactic of sympathetic strikes to follow up local strikes was used by the left-wing trade unions. The LSSP called for sympathy strikes in the Badulla district and in Ratnapura, arising from a strike after the dismissal of four workers in the first case, and because a superintendent refused to grant permission for the union to hold a meeting in the second.

THE KNAVESMIRE STRUGGLE

Another issue that agitated plantation labour in 1946 arose from the efforts of the government to implement its policy of encouraging Sinhalese landless peasants to work on plantations under the Village Expansion Scheme. The proposal was that several estates were to be taken over and worked on a cooperative basis, with homes provided for select landless persons. The plantation land taken over for this scheme included Knavesmire Estate, Bulathkohupitiya, in the Kelani Valley district, which comprised 480 acres of rubber and 280 acres of tea. The estate population consisted of 515 Indian workers, including women and children, a large majority of whom had lived for a long period on the estate. When this

estate was acquired by the government, all the resident Indian workers were excluded from the proposed land settlement. The intention of the settlement had been to provide around 275 homesteads on the estate. If the Indian workers had been included in the scheme, they would have needed around eighty more homesteads. Defending the exclusion of the Indian workers from this scheme, Minister D. S. Senanayake, Minister of Agriculture and Lands and leader of the State Council, argued that it was meant purely to benefit landless villagers. The Land Commissioner N. E. Ernst asserted that Indian workers' claims were rejected because 'they do not form part of the village population and ... have no permanent interest in the village area' (*Times of Ceylon*, 29 May 1946).

This episode created a great deal of resentment among the affected workers and the Ceylon Indian Congress cited it as an instance of discrimination against Indians. The union, under the leadership of S. Thondaman, urged the workers not to leave Knavesmire Estate and an island-wide *hartal* was held on 4 June 1946, involving 270,000 Indians and 32,000 non-Indian plantation workers, as well as Indian traders in Colombo, who closed their shops. A further strike in support took place on 12 June, in which 23,000 Indian and 5,000 non-Indian workers in the Kelani Valley and Kegalle districts and 53,000 Indian and 500 non-Indian workers in the Dickoya district struck work. The strike continued and the *Times of Ceylon* reported heavy losses on plantations due to this strike of 86,000 workers (20 June 1946). D. S. Senanayake condemned the *hartal* as an action injurious to the economic interests of the country as a whole and a threat to law and order of the country, which also embittered relations between Indians and Ceylonese.⁴

Responding to the minister, the CIC issued a pamphlet stating basic human justice was required for the Indian population in Ceylon. It reminded him of the report in 1943 by Major Orde Browne, the Colonial Office Labour expert,⁵ who had recommended the assimilation of Ceylon Indians in the country. As such, the CIC felt that it was the duty of the government to help this process through providing facilities for settlements rather than the opposite.

it is against all standards of humanity and labour to stipulate that a village expansion should displace wholesale the people who have been

⁴ Report by the Hon. Mr. D. S. Senanayake, Minister for Agriculture and Lands on the Knavesmire Estate and Matters Connected Therewith, Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Secretariat, Colombo, 1 July, 1946.

⁵ Sessional Paper No.19 of 1943, paras 63 and 64.

long resident in the areas to be [either] directed to work in other estates or if such [work] is not available, to be repatriated. The Ceylon Indian Congress does not ask that every worker should be selected as an allottee but that those among them who have been long resident on the estate should be given an equal chance in the selection test with the rest of the residents of the area.⁶

When the workers refused to leave Knavesmire estate, the CIC gave them necessary assistance. In the Kegalle courts, 363 claims were filed against the workers, charging them with criminal trespass for refusing to leave the estate (Thondaman 1987: 220). The first case was heard on 27 June 1946 and involved Selvanayagam, who had always lived and worked on Knavesmire estate. He was sentenced to two months' rigorous imprisonment. In the next round of cases, the workers received three months' hard labour and fines of Rs 100 each. By August 1946, fifty-five of these cases had been heard and all the accused found guilty. In all the cases, the accused had appealed and been released and had gone back to Knavesmire estate, Rs 11,000 having been deposited as bail. During this struggle, the President of the CIC, S. Thondaman, had pledged his estate Wavendon as security and had obtained the release of convicted persons on bail (Thondaman 1987: 220). The hundredth Knavesmire trial case on 25 August was of a 60-year-old woman who was fined. Since those who were on bail continued to occupy their line-rooms and were helped materially by the CIC, the government was unable to place Sinhala colonists on the estate. The whole incident attracted attention locally and abroad. In the House of Commons, the Secretary of State, George Hall was questioned on the matter and called for a full report on the issue (*Times of Ceylon*, 6 June 1946). The British government also intervened as it was particularly concerned about the unrest that had occurred in the plantation areas in the wake of the Knavesmire dispute (Thondaman 1987: 220). Further, the CIC appealed to Nehru and the Indian National Congress and several Indian trade union figures came to Sri Lanka to inquire into the matter.

Local opinion was equally outspoken; a leading King's Counsel, H. V. Perera described the Knavesmire evictions as a 'scandalous state of affairs', with the government 'on one side and the helpless labourers on the other.' He argued that it was 'an ugly state of things to take a

⁶ The Ceylon Indian Congress Comments on the Report by the Hon. Mr D. S. Senanayake, Leader of the State Council and the Minister of Agriculture and Lands on the Knavesmire Estate and Matters Connected Therewith, Signed by S. Thondaman, President, Colombo, 9 July 1946.

man who was not a criminal and put him in jail in order to get him out of the place' (*Times of Ceylon*, 20 August 1946). Planter reaction was equivocal, since the dispute was not directed against the employers. One Dickoya planter was reported as saying: 'This terrible situation has arisen from the great Knavesmire tragedy. If the government had opened up new crown land ... prosperous colonies would have attracted landless villagers; the Indians in Knavesmire would have been left in peace.' The President of the Estate Employers Federation, Kenneth Morford, was more cautious and said: 'Though the planters understood the position of the labourers they could not intervene at this stage, because the planters were not a political body and so did not wish to be involved in the present political controversy between the government and the Ceylon Indian Congress' (*Times of Ceylon*, 29 June 1946). The Labour Department also did not intervene in the strike, as the matter did not arise out of a trade union dispute.

When the appeal of the first worker to be tried (Selvanayagam) was dismissed, he had to commit himself before the magistrate to be jailed; the incident was made into a political event. Selvanayagam came to courts in a decorated car and was received and garlanded by the CIC leaders, Peri Sunderam and G. R. Motha. The same evening, a large meeting was held at Knavesmire estate, chaired by S. Thondaman, the president of the CIC (*Congress News*, 26 May 1952). After a three-day resistance, D. S. Senanayake had conversations with the Indian representative in Ceylon, L. S. Aney, and the Governor granted a special pardon to all the accused workers. However, the CIC, although it had called off the agitation on advice from the Indian National Congress, was determined to challenge the legality of the government's action. The case of Selvanayagam was taken to the Privy Council, which held that the criminal trespass law could not be applied to persons who had been continually resident on a plantation (Thondaman 1987: 220).

ABROGATION OF THE SEVEN-POINT AGREEMENT

In response to such events, the planters expressed their dissatisfaction with the working of the Seven-Point Agreement. In June 1946, the Planters' Association, the Ceylon Estates Proprietary Association, and the Ceylon Association in London abrogated the Agreement in spite of efforts by the Controller of Labour, who had stressed the importance of continuing the agreement. The planters' organisations, in a letter to the Minister of Labour, wrote:

The Seven-Point Agreement was made to meet an emergency, and while the war lasted we have endeavoured to observe its terms as fully as we could, in spite of many defects which were experienced in practice. The trifling nature of many of the alleged disputes over which our members have been obliged to attend conferences, lightning strikes in contravention of Clause 2 of the Agreement, and similar facts, have led us to the conclusion that the Agreement has outlived its usefulness (Planters' Association Files 1946).

The estate trade unions made representations to the government that, since the employers had repudiated the Seven-Point Agreement, the right to strike should be restored to the workers with the repeal of the Essential Services (Avoidance of Strikes and Lockouts) Ordinance of 1942. The tea and rubber industries were removed from the schedule of 'essential services' by the government in 1946, leading to a significant increase in strikes on the estates. The strength and nature of these strikes were influenced by the labour unrest in other parts of the country as well as the political debates that were taking place on constitutional reforms.

THE SOULBURY CONSTITUTION

Unlike India, where there had been a vibrant nationalist movement in the 1930s, the political leadership in the State Council in Ceylon had proposed a draft constitution in 1944, demanding reforms of the constitution to give the country something akin to dominion status, but not full Independence. In contrast, the Left parties called for full independence. It was towards the end of the Second World War, in 1944, that the British government appointed a commission under the chairmanship of Lord Soulbury to consider reforms to the constitution. The commission visited Ceylon and a White Paper on the proposed new constitution was issued in October 1945, providing for a cabinet system of government, a House of Representatives elected by universal suffrage, and a Senate elected indirectly. The British were given rights to have a base in the airport at Katunayake as well as a naval base in Trincomalee, these concessions leading to protests that the Soulbury constitution was a sham. The LSSP led by N. M. Perera, the BLP led by Colvin R. de Silva and the Communist Party led by Dr S.A. Wickremasinghe were all active on the political scene in opposing this constitution.

The status of plantation workers of Indian origin had been taken up in with the Indian government in 1941, during which the franchise and

migration of the plantation workers were discussed with D. S. Senanayake, the leader of the State Council in Ceylon and G. S. Bajpai, a senior Indian civil servant in 1941 (Devaraj 2008: 14–15). Most of the decisions were, however, postponed due to the ongoing war effort. In 1945, the Ceylon Indian Congress joined the agitation against the new constitution on the grounds that it did not give adequate representation to the minorities or grant full independence to the country. On 12 February 1946, the CIC, supported by the communist union, organised a one-day hartal on the plantations as a protest against the acceptance of this constitution. This was a significant event—the first purely political strike in Ceylon—and it involved 290,000 Indian and 51,000 non-Indian plantation workers and the largest stoppage of work in terms of numbers of workers on strike to that date. It was, moreover, a significant example of joint action by CIC and the Left. No action was taken against the strikers under the Essential Services Order, as the strike was not in furtherance of a trade dispute and, at this time, the government had no provision for dealing with political strikes.

The new constitution, although not granting full independence to Sri Lanka, was accepted by a majority in the State Council; and in May 1946 an Order-in-Council was promulgated to bring it into being. Writing about his experience several years later in 1963, Lord Soulbury noted that the commission was aware of the vulnerabilities of minority groups in the country and had included provisions for their protection. According to him:

While the Commission was in Ceylon, the speeches of certain Sinhalese politicians calling for the solidarity of the Sinhalese and threatening the suppression of the Tamils emphasised the need for constitutional safeguards on behalf of that and other minorities. ... Nevertheless—in the light of later happenings—I now think it is a pity that the Commission did not also recommend the entrenchment in the constitution of guarantees of fundamental rights, on the lines enacted in the constitutions of India, Pakistan, Malaya, Nigeria and elsewhere (Farmer 1963: vii).

INCREASED TRADE-UNION MILITANCY

Several serious economic problems arose in the country during this period. In 1946, the bulk contract sales to Britain of the island's tea, rubber and graphite came to an end. There was a serious slump in the rubber industry due to a fall in world prices and a worsening of the balance of payments

caused by a rapid increase in imports. A rise in urban unemployment after 1945 was also a marked feature of this period, the total registered unemployed rising from 30,000 in 1945 to 97,000 in 1946 and 123,000 in 1948 (*Reports of the Controller of Labour 1945-48*).

In this post-war period, militancy grew among non-estate workers. The three Left parties constantly emphasised the economic problems facing the working class and led the urban trade union agitation of these years. On its part, the government viewed the urban workers' general strike of 1946 as a political demonstration rather than a genuine trade union dispute, since the demands of the strikers were linked with a demand for the rejection of the constitutional reforms. Moreover, there was a temporary united front of the Left parties and the Labour Party, resulting in a feeling in government quarters that the strike was an attempt by the Left to test its political strength. Independently of urban labour, there was also a sharp increase in strike activity on tea and rubber plantations in 1946-47. As mentioned earlier, the abrogation of the Seven-Point Agreement was used as a reason to take increased strike action.

As is normal in times of crisis, there were some in the government who tried to incite fears amongst the people by portraying the demands of the strikers as attempts to destabilise the government and create chaos in society. A member of the State Council, E. A. Nugawela, referred to the event as a 'try out at revolution', and another member, J. R. Jayewardene, called it a 'minor social upheaval.' The *Ceylon Daily News* (owned by J. R. Jayewardene's maternal uncle, D. R. Wijewardene) claimed that there was clearly 'a more sinister motive behind the epidemic of strikes', which revealed 'a cunningly devised plan to paralyse essential services and threaten to disorganize the life of the community' (19 October 1946).

ELECTIONS UNDER THE SOULBURY CONSTITUTION

The political strength of the plantation workers was brought home even more sharply in the 1947 elections, the first conducted under the Soulbury Constitution. In this election, the recently formed United National Party, led by political leaders of the State Council (D. S. Senanayake, J. L. Kotelewala and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike) gained forty-two out of ninety-five seats and formed the government with D. S. Senanayake as prime minister. The Left in opposition did unexpectedly well, with the LSSP, CP and BLP gaining ten, three and five seats respectively. The BLP under the leadership of Colvin R. de Silva subsequently came together

with the LSSP, with N. M. Perera becoming the official leader of the opposition in parliament.

The Ceylon Indian Congress with its trade union wing exercised a considerable influence in the plantation areas winning seven out of the eight seats they contested. The seven CIC MPs elected in 1947 were S. Thondaman, C. V. Velupillai, S. M. Subbiah, D. Ramanujam, K. Kumaravelu, K. Rajalingam and G. R. Motha. G. R. Motha passed away soon after the elections and his seat (Maskeliya) was won by A. Aziz. Furthermore, where they did not field their own candidates, the plantation workers supported left-wing candidates, thus having a sizeable influence in thirteen or fourteen constituencies. But the power of the plantation vote could have, in reality, been much more. While 225,000 voters from the plantation community had been registered in 1939, which was just 20 per cent of the population, the State Council leaders managed to whittle down this number by requiring members of the plantation community to appear for an interview to be eligible to vote. According to P. P. Devaraj, 'As adequate and proper information was not given many failed to appear for the interview and consequently were dropped from the list of voters. The figure was reduced from 225,000 to 168,000' (2014).

This demonstration of the electoral strength of plantation labour was clearly a matter of concern to the more conservative parties, particularly the United National Party. Many of the leaders—formerly members of the Ceylon National Congress—had not been in favour of granting franchise rights to the workers in the 1927 proposed reforms. The 1947 elections did not give the UNP a clear majority and it was, to some extent, dependent on minority parties and independents. The growing tacit coalition between the plantation workers and the leftwing parties was evident in the voting on different issues in the new parliament. Thus class conflict in the island intensified, and political positions became more sharply polarised by the time the country became independent in 1948, when the franchise and citizenship struggles of Indians in Ceylon came to the fore.

CHALLENGING THE PLANTER RAJ

Part III has showed how the labour protests and trade union development on the plantations assumed political significance in Ceylon with the constitutional reforms of the 1930s and the provision of franchise to the local population. These changes opened up the possibility of plantation workers having the right to vote in local and national elections. The

potential electoral significance of the plantation community—as a specific group of Indian workers, located in the centre of the island, and forming the single largest section of the working class—became a serious concern for the Sinhalese ultra-nationalist politicians and labour leaders, who resorted to ethnic chauvinism for electoral gains. Caught between these different tensions, the plantation workers, their unions and their political parties had to battle simultaneously for their labour and democratic rights. This situation was unique to plantation labour, and stood in contrast to the Sinhalese urban working class who enjoyed these rights as their natural entitlement. Similar to other plantation economies, the issue of franchise brought out ethnic and class divisions into the political arena.

The decade before independence was marked by heightened labour activity and agitation in the plantation sector. The workers struggled simultaneously for their economic and democratic rights, often blurring the demarcation between plantation trade unionism and national politics. At the same time, this nexus of labour and democratic rights posed threats to groups and parties that dominated national politics. The seeds of ethnic chauvinism that were to spread more systematically in national politics in the subsequent period were already evident in the early discussions on the citizenship rights of the plantation workers, which will be discussed in Part IV of this volume.

PART four

Citizenship,
Statelessness
and Repatriation

Citizenship, Statelessness and Repatriation

Ceylon's independence from Britain in February 1948 was viewed as a major political step for the labour movement on the plantations. The Ceylon Indian Congress and the Left parties had made substantial gains in the 1947 parliamentary elections, helped by the strength of the plantation electorate. But the joint actions and militancy displayed by these groups in the immediate pre-Independence period were also sources of concern for the Sinhala and Tamil bourgeoisie. In addition, the withdrawal of the British colonial government and the presence of large numbers of workers of Indian origin in the island only fuelled the propaganda of some Sinhalese extremists that plantation workers would not only 'swamp' electorates, but also constitute a 'fifth column' in an Indian takeover of the country.

Thus, when the country gained Independence, it had a government that had a strong interest in curbing the political strength of the plantation workers. With little delay, it took measures to restrict their political influence and potency by enacting new citizenship and franchise laws that excluded the vast majority of the plantation workers from participating in national politics. These actions, as we shall see, were major setbacks for the labour movement on the plantations. Dealing with this huge democratic deficit overshadowed its demands and negotiations in the subsequent four decades.

THE CITIZENSHIP AND FRANCHISE ACTS OF 1948 AND 1949

Six months after Independence in 1948, the newly elected parliament enacted citizenship and franchise laws that had a direct bearing on the vast majority of the plantation workers. These were:

- a) The Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948
- b) The Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949
- c) Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act of 1949

Class and ethnic divisions were reflected in the debates on the Acts. In introducing the first Citizenship Act in parliament in August 1948, Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake said that it was a 'simple bill' and that the government was only trying to 'confer Ceylon citizenship on people in Ceylon who are not citizens of another country', adding that 'we have the right to determine our own citizenship and to enact our own laws for that purpose' (*Hansard*, 19 August 1948). The Act, however, was neither simple nor objective in determining the right to citizenship. The government chose not to provide citizenship through the principle of birth, but rather through descent and registration—conditions that were particularly problematic for the plantation workers.

According to the 1948 Act, persons could claim Ceylon citizenship if they had two out of three immediate ancestors in the paternal line born in the country. Further, an applicant born after the fixed date was eligible for citizenship if the father had been a citizen at the time of the applicant's birth. The Act automatically granted citizenship to the 'indigenous' groups in Ceylon, such as the Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamils, Ceylon Moors and Burghers, while Indians had to request this status through registration, and adequate documentation, including proof of second and third generation ancestry in the country. These conditions made it extremely difficult for the plantation workers to qualify for citizenship. The most important reason was that most workers could not prove that their fathers and grandfathers had been born in the country, as registration of their births had not started until 1895. Shelton Kodikara, in his study on the Act, concluded that it 'not intended to provide for citizenship for the vast majority of Indians in Ceylon' (1965: 109). The *Satyodaya Bulletin* of the Coordinating Secretariat for Plantation Areas, observed at a later date, that

D.S. Senanayake, Prime Minister in 1948, admitted that he would have found it difficult to produce the birth certificate of his father if he was asked to prove that he was a citizen of Ceylon. And if anyone could not produce the birth certificate of the father, the consolation the Act gave was to ask the person to produce the birth certificates of his grandfather and great-grandfather! This D.S. Senanayake would of course never have been able to do. However it was presumed that he, and hundreds of thousands like him, Sinhalese, Tamils of the North and East, Muslims and

Burghers, were citizens. The estate worker and other 19th century Tamil immigrants alone were asked to prove that they were citizens. Not being able to produce proof, they were declared to be non-citizens, stateless (*Voice of the Voiceless March* 1986: 4).

This discriminatory Act was loudly condemned by different sections in parliament including the Communist Party (CP) and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) (*Hansard*, 19 August 1948). The LSSP stressed the class bias in the Act whereby a large section of the working class had been deprived of basic democratic rights. Pieter Keuneman, the main speaker of the CP, claimed that the legislation 'operated in favour of the rich and educated and militated against the poor, the working people of this country.' In a similar vein, Colvin R. de Silva also highlighted the class implications of the Bill:

There is the cloven hoof of the class approach peeping from under the mantle of an impartial citizenship principle. In defining the principle of citizenship what this government has kept in the forefront of its mind is neither human justice nor social justice, but precisely restriction in the interest of a particular class (*Hansard*, 19 Aug. 1948).

In the Senate (the upper house of parliament), an Independent member and leading lawyer S. Nadesan, QC, spoke up for the human rights of plantation workers, remarking also that citizenship was being denied to 'a very large number of people, who have been responsible for the present prosperity of this country' (Speech in the Senate, 15 September 1948):

It indeed ironical that anybody who has the interests of this country at heart should stand up and tell the Plantation Tamil labourer, who has by the sweat of his brow contributed to the wealth and prosperity of this country, 'you do not take part in the social activities of this country; you are segregated in a coolie line and therefore we will not give you citizenship rights'. That is not justice; that is not fair play ... It will be a weakness on the part of the country if we fail to integrate them with the rest of the population.

While the Left parties exposed the class implications of the legislation, they also highlighted its discriminatory ethnic aspects. N. M. Perera of the LSSP condemned the income restriction of the citizenship clauses and noted that such restrictions were not placed on the Sinhalese:

If an unemployed so-called Sinhalese man is fit enough to get rights, why should an Indian who has no income be deprived of those rights? If that is the criterion, is that not racial prejudice of the worst type? (*Hansard*, 10 Dec. 1948)

Similar sentiments were expressed by other left leaders. Colvin R. de Silva described the Bill as a 'thoroughly black record', saying that it was 'another dig with a racial spade to make a future grave for universal adult franchise' (*Hansard*, 19 August 1948). The Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) also argued against the provisions of the Citizenship Acts, with S. Thondaman stating that 'his people' had 'toiled and made the waste land productive' and were 'as much Kandyan as anyone else' (cited in Sabaratnam 1990: 36). In response to the query by J. R. Jayewardene as to whether he was a 'Kandyan Tamil', Thondaman replied that 'Yes ... I am a Kandyan Tamil.'

At the same time, certain Sinhalese politicians took chauvinist positions on the issue of citizenship, a notable example being T. F. Jayewardene, who said

If some of the members of the opposition had the same depth of feeling for their own people as they have for their *cochchi sahodarayas* [Malayali comrades] they will agree with me that 40 males living in a house with 4 or 5 Tamil or Sinhalese women are hardly the type of people who are to be encouraged to become citizens of Ceylon (*Hansard*, 10 December 1948).

Anti-minority sentiments were also evident in some urban labour organisations in the country. A. E. Goonesinha, the former labour leader in the 1920s, had earlier launched the slogan of 'equal rights' for all workers irrespective 'caste, religion and race'. He had even worked together with Natesa Aiyar, the leader of the first trade union on the plantations. Goonesinha changed his position during the economic depression of the early 1930s and in order not to lose his urban base he raised the cry of 'Ceylon for the Ceylonese'. By 1947, he became a minister in the UNP-led government. When accused by LSSP member T. B. Subasinghe of 'racism', he responded

If for the protection of the interests of the nationals of this country, the interests of hundreds of thousands of workers of this country, I have to be racial then I am indeed racial and I shall continue to be racial (*Hansard*, 10 December 1948).

In spite of the opposition to the Citizenship Act of 1948, it was passed with fifty-three members voting for and thirty-five members against. Those who voted for the Act included several Tamils, namely the two Tamil ministers in the government, C. Sunderlingam and C. Sittampalam; independents such as S. U. Ethirimasingham, V. Nalliah and A. I. Thambiyah; and Tamil Congress members K. Kanagaratnam and T. Ramalingam. Some Muslim members, such as T. B. Jayah, H. S. Ismail, M. S. Kariapper and A. L. Sinnalebbe, also voted with the government, as did the European appointed members. However, the Tamil Congress, led by G. G. Ponnambalam and including S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, which represented mainly the northern Tamil constituencies, voted against the Act. Shortly after, however, the Tamil Congress decided to join forces with the UNP, and its leader G. G. Ponnambalam was made Minister of Industries and Fisheries. This led to a split in the Tamil Congress, with five of its members joining the UNP government and two others, S. J. G. Chelvanayakam and C. Vanniasingham resigning and forming the Federal Party—the latter being welcomed and supported by the Ceylon Indian Congress.

The second Act—the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949—provided the possibility of obtaining citizenship by registration under some conditions of domicile, including residence and income qualifications. This enabled Indian traders and businessmen (Bohras, Khojas, Parsis and others) to qualify, but it was not easy for plantation workers to fulfil the required qualifications.¹ This again was a blatant form of class-biased legislation. The administrative procedures were 'cumbersome and slow-moving', making it very difficult for the estate workers to attain citizenship (Kodikara 1965: 113). The Federal Party and the Left parties opposed this Bill but a majority in parliament passed it, with Tamil Congress members, including G. G. Ponnambalam, voting in favour. Some members of the Tamil Congress, however, notably S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, were highly critical of both Citizenship Acts, condemning their discriminatory provisions. At its ninth annual

¹ Applicants, when married, had to prove 7 years of 'continued residence' in the country, from January 1939 while unmarried applicants were required this proof for 10 years. In addition, they were required to have 'an assured income of a reasonable amount' and had to satisfy the authorities of their 'permanent settlement' and 'permanent interest' in the country. The clause concerning 'continuous residence' was applied relatively strictly, and even brief holidays to India was interpreted by some officials as a means of disqualifying applications from citizenship.

session in April 1949, the CIC adopted a resolution condemning the Acts as 'humiliating, discriminatory and anti-social', particularly for estate workers and pointing out that the qualifications required 'were complex and involved, and beyond the capacity of workers with little or no education', a position supported by several Indian newspapers and the Madras Legislative Assembly (Kodikara 1965: 111). As just an 'infinitesimal' number of Indians could claim citizenship under the 1948 Act, the only possibility for the majority of them to apply for Ceylon citizenship was under the 1949 Indian and Pakistani Residents' Citizenship Act. The latter came into force in 5 August 1949 with a two-year deadline for the filing of applications (Kodikara 1965: 113).

The third Act—the Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act of 1949—restricted the franchise to those who were citizens of the country. This was the outcome of the policy followed by the ruling party to remove the voting power of plantation labour and thus decimate their political strength. It served also to satisfy the mounting pressures from some sections of the Sinhalese in the plantation region who feared the electoral strength of the plantation workers. As K. M. de Silva observed:

Thus the new citizenship legislation not only served to assuage the fears and suspicions of the Sinhalese in general and the Kandyans in particular, but also to demolish a potentially powerful prop of the left-wing groups. The immediate effect of this was to distort the electoral balance even more markedly than before, and to make the Sinhalese rural voter the arbiter of the country's politics (de Silva 1981: 493).

These three Acts represented a major shift in politics from lip service to liberal democracy during colonial rule to a blatant flouting of democratic values under the independent government. It was also a major blow for the democratic aspirations and human rights of the plantation workers and marked the beginning of a long struggle to overcome their political exclusion.

The CIC initially decided that its members would boycott applying for citizenship under the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949, a decision that was supported fully by the vast majority of the workers. It also filed a suit challenging the legality of these Acts, which was rejected by the Supreme Court, and the CIC subsequently appealed to the Privy Council against this ruling (Sabaratnam 1990: 38–40). But as the government refused to change its stand, the CIC called off the boycott 21 in May 1950, resulting in 'a spate of hastily completed forms' submitted a few weeks before the deadline of 5 August 1951, with 160,000

of the 237,034 applications being received in the last ten weeks (Kodikara 1965: 114 and footnote 26).

The seriousness of this political exclusion became apparent in the 1952 elections. After the unexpected death of the Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake on 22 March 1952, the leadership of the UNP party, taken over by his son, Dudley Senanayake, called for elections shortly after on 28 April 1952. As most of the plantation workers had boycotted applying for citizenship for most of the two years that were allocated for this purpose, they were not registered or included in the 1950 electoral list. As a result there was also little possibility for their leadership (the seven members of parliament) to get re-elected to office.

The electoral districts and the seat allocations for the 1952 elections were based on the size of the population. Since the majority of plantation workers lived in the Kandyan region, but were disqualified from voting, the Kandyan Sinhalese were able to benefit from these extra seats. The removal of the plantation vote also meant that minority representation was reduced in parliament, and the majority Sinhalese had extra representation. This strategy was effective in decimating the electoral power of the plantation workers, and in spite of their large numbers the plantation workers were unable to return a single representative to parliament in the 1952 election as a result of the Citizenship and Franchise Acts of 1948 and 1949. Thus, plantation workers went from being an important and strategic factor in national politics to finding themselves effectively barred from national politics and dependent on the goodwill of other parties and the government. The problem of statelessness was to hamstring the labour movement on the plantations in the subsequent period and isolate these workers from the wider trade union struggles. In a very real sense, the disfranchisement of the plantation workers, so shortly after Independence, had a bearing on the political history of the country in subsequent years, laying the foundation for ethnic tension and disregard for democratic processes in national politics.

THE SATYAGRAHA OF 1952

The CIC, aware of the threat to the political representation of plantation workers in parliament, launched a satyagraha (nonviolent civil disobedience) on election day to 'focus public attention on the confiscation of the civic rights of an entire community and to induce the authorities to take immediate steps to restore them' (*Hindu*, 2 May

1952). From 1 May 1952, the satyagraha, consisting of two groups of fifty, each fasting for five days under the leadership of A. Aziz, S. Thondaman and other CIC leaders, took place at the Prime Minister's office and the House of Representatives (Sabaratnam 1990: 41–44). Simultaneously, other CIC members occupied the steps of the Parliament building and their actions were often met with police brutality. The influential south Indian newspaper, the *Hindu*, was critical of the 'unhappy turn of affairs in Colombo', finding the response of Government of Ceylon to be 'curiously disappointing' and condemning the police measures that were resorted to in dealing with the satyagrahis (2 May 1952). As the satyagraha continued, the newspaper reported on the violence that was meted out to those demanding 'human rights':

Messrs S. Thondaiman, A. Aziz and other Congress volunteers arrived at Parliament House to offer 'satyagraha' during the debate on the vote of thanks to the speech of the Governor-General opening Parliament as a protest against disfranchisement of Ceylon Indians. Defying the order of the Speaker disallowing demonstrations within the precincts of Parliament, the Congressmen insisted that they should be allowed to see the Speaker who had been intimated about 'satyagraha' in Parliament premises. When the 'satyagrahis' did not move from their place, the officer in charge of the Police first tried to push the 'satyagrahis' away in an attempt to disperse the gathering. The 'satyagrahis' with posters hanging from their necks, 'We want human rights. We want citizenship and franchise, which is our birthright', and other demonstrators were dragged along the ground to the road (*Hindu*, 19 June 1952).

A meeting was held at the Colombo Town Hall on 5 August 1952, to observe the hundredth day of the campaign, at which many leaders of opposition parties protested against the treatment meted out to the plantation workers. Those representing the Left parties included Colvin R. de Silva, who stressed that the disfranchisement of the plantation workers was a concern of all communities and proved the need for trade union solidarity, and Philip Gunawardena, who condemned the 'unjust, unfair and inhuman' treatment meted out to the plantation workers (Jayawardena 2003: 63). Pieter Keuneman of the CP, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam of the Federal Party, and plantation labour leaders, S. Thondaman and A. Aziz also spoke in condemnation of the policy of disenfranchisement.

A few Buddhist monks supported the satyagraha and were critical of the government's policy towards the plantation workers. K. Indasara

Thero, representing twenty-nine monks of the Prabuddha Bhikshu Mandalaya of Gampola, appealed to the Prime Minister:

The Indians who are here are a vital part of the agriculture and industry of our land. Moreover, they were brought here by the British rulers of old and have directly or indirectly helped the development of our land. It seems a gross injustice to treat them now as unwanted foreigners. Our country is utilising their services to maintain our economy. Let us then give them the fundamental rights they are appealing for (*Congress News*, 26 May 1952).

In spite of considerable political agitation and support by other sections of the Indian population in Ceylon as well the Left parties and religious groups, the government refused to change its position. Nevertheless, the satyagraha was sustained for over 140 days with those participating in the campaign being the targets of police violence and abuse. The decision to withdraw the satyagraha was taken at the Hatton session of the CIC in September 1952 (Sabaratnam 1990: 50).

The political blow to the CIC and the plantation workers meant that they were, in effect, excluded from national politics. The segregation of the plantation workers from trade union politics was clearly visible during the hartal of 1953, which was supported by most of the opposition groups. The economic conditions in the country had deteriorated following the end of the Korean War with the collapse in the price of rubber and the fall in foreign exchange earnings in 1953. Politically, a major change had also taken place in 1951 when S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and others left the UNP to form a new party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which was based on a more social democratic programme.

The hartal (or general stoppage of work) was organised jointly by the Left parties and the Federal Party in 1953 against the decision of the UNP government to abolish the subsidy on rice, which had resulted in a sudden and sharp increase in its price. A protest rally was held on Galle Face Green in Colombo on 26 July 1953, where the police tear gassed the protestors. A 24-hour hartal was held on 12 August. In spite of its broad base of support, the participation of the plantation workers was minimal—in fact, conspicuous by its near absence—particularly in the light of some of the joint struggles of the previous years. Some workers living near the villages (particularly in the low and mid-country areas) joined the hartal on an individual basis, but the plantation workers and the unions did not participate in this struggle. The CWC waited to see if the SLFP would join the hartal, but when this did not happen, it 'gave

up the idea as they feared a backlash against plantation workers' (P. P. Devaraj, personal communication, 15 March 2012). In many ways, the hartal marked, as we shall see in the following sections, an important break in the alliance between the plantation workers and the Left, which, since the late 1930s, had often resulted in powerful and militant working-class action for labour and democratic rights.

The removal of citizenship and the subsequent political isolation of the plantation workers from the wider working class struggles reduced them once again to their 'captive labour' status, while exposing them not only to serious democratic deficits but to economic and social exploitation reminiscent of the colonial period. The laws on citizenship were particularly reprehensible as the plantation community, together with the rest of the population, had, under colonialism, been 'British subjects' with voting rights. These laws reflected what Mohamed Salih has referred to as the 'majoritarian tyranny' of parliamentary democracy through which the human rights of minorities can be both challenged and abused if the majority should assert through democratic practices the desire to 'legitimise and sustain the majority's holding of power' (Salih 2003: 105). The Sinhala and Tamil bourgeoisie in parliament feared the electoral and mobilisation power of the plantation workers that had been demonstrated in the previous decades and were determined to ensure that this potential threat to their own political authority was eliminated in the subsequent period. The preoccupation with 'statelessness' and 'citizenship' of the Tamil plantation workers in the subsequent period was to overshadow the labour movement on the plantations in the subsequent period.

Ethnic Tensions and Citizenship (1954–1970)

The Opposition unleashed a sustained barrage of racist propaganda in which S. L. F. P., as the unabashed advocates of the Sinhalese Buddhist domination of Sri Lanka Policy, was joined by the Communist Party and the L. S. S. P. The left-wing leadership demonstrated all the ardour of recent converts in espousing a cause which they had once spurned.

(K.M. de Silva 1981: 530).

Prior to the 1950s, all political parties, including the Left parties, had supported the idea of parity of Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages, viewing the continued civil administration in English as somewhat anomalous after Independence. While there was a rapid expansion of secondary education in Sinhala and Tamil in line with these ideas, many were unable to compete for jobs where fluency in English was required—jobs that were usually better paid. The early 1950s, at the same time, witnessed an economic downturn worsened by the fall in the price of rubber, leaving large sections of the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie facing problems of unemployment and feeling ‘economically, socially and politically deprived and excluded from the various material privileges of society’ (Jayawardena 2003: 70). These groups, educated in Sinhalese, viewed the issue of language as a nationalist rallying point to gain advantages in society.

The 1950s also witnessed a revival of religious fervour, with several important associations publicly arguing that Buddhism had not been given its rightful place in the country. The All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 1956 criticised the political leaders for their alleged betrayal of Buddhism, viewing them as ‘completely dominated by an alien outlook and values and estranged from their national history and culture’ (Jayawardena

2003: 68). Attention was given to the duty of the Sinhalese to uphold Buddhism. A 'totally romanticized and unhistorical view of the past, based on mythology, fantasy and racial "destiny"' was to remain basically unchallenged by many sections of the Sinhala intelligentsia of the period. As a result, 'prejudices and misconceptions of an earlier colonial period of nascent nationalism persisted and grew in strength' (Jayawardena 2003: 69).

SINHALA ONLY

These two issues, language and religion, were consciously adopted by Sinhala Buddhist nationalists to make political gains. They took up the demand for increased Sinhala employment, a claim that was viewed as 'egalitarian' in the light of the widespread unemployment among Sinhala youth in the 1950s. This campaign developed into a call for 'Sinhala Only' to the exclusion of Tamil as a national language of the country—a message that was spread with the help of several significant Sinhala groups, particularly from the rural and urban petty-bourgeoisie. The most militant activists who organised agitation for 'Sinhala Only' were monks, who viewed themselves as the protectors of the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage, as well as teachers, students, youth, ayurvedic physicians and other Sinhala-educated groups who felt marginalised. They supported Sinhala nationalism and demanded a privileged place for the majority community.

Matters took a qualitative change in the late 1950s as political parties hoped that by using language as an issue they could gain extra votes at the elections. Moreover, the curbing of the Tamil plantation vote by the Citizenship Acts of 1948 and 1949 had effectively strengthened the Sinhala vote and weakened the collective strength of minority groups in electoral politics. The demand for 'Sinhala Only' was vigorously championed by the SLFP and Philip Gunawardena's VLSSP (a breakaway group from the LSSP) who had succumbed to these majoritarian sentiments, coming together under the banner of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) for the 1956 elections. The 'Sinhala Only' platform took on an anti-Tamil stance, viewing Tamils as the strongest among the minority groups that had 'usurped the privileges' of the majority Sinhalese. In addition, the electoral campaign of the SLFP spoke of the rights of the Sinhalese and highlighted the threat from the Indian Tamils—the majority of whom belonged to the plantation community—who were seen as having close links with India.

The Sinhala-Buddhist platform was to prove a winning card for the SLFP. The elections were won by a coalition headed by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, which won fifty-one out of ninety-five seats in the new government, thus forming a majority government. The first legislation under Prime Minister Bandaranaike was to make Sinhala the sole official language. As K. M. de Silva wrote: 'The race riots which broke out in the wake of the introduction of the "Sinhala Only" Bill had underlined the combustible nature of linguistic nationalism in a plural society' (1981: 513). Neil DeVotta commented that the Sinhala Only Act

affected state employment and educational policies at a time when the State was the country's largest employer and when university education was viewed as a key to socio-economic progress. Equally important, the act led to ethnic outbidding, and it legitimated Sinhalese jingoism, which only radicalized an otherwise culturally and politically conservative Tamil community. The Sirimavo Bandaranaike governments were so successful in favouring the Sinhalese that the majority community became disproportionately overrepresented, especially in the bureaucracy (2004: 136).

De Silva goes on to note that 'to assuage the feelings of the Tamils, Bandaranaike in August 1958, secured Parliamentary approval for the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act to permit the reasonable use of Tamil in administration' (1981: 514–15).

The Tamil Federal Party organised a satyagraha on 5 June 1956 when the 'Sinhala Only' Bill was introduced in parliament, but their leaders including Chelvanayakam and Amirthalingam were assaulted by a crowd and other anti-Tamil incidents also took place elsewhere in Colombo. According to the speaker of the House of Representatives, the Act was not a constitutional amendment and thus required just a simple majority (de Silva 1981: 512). The Official Language Act (No. 33 of 1956) was certified on 7 July 1956, recognising Sinhala as 'the one official language of Ceylon' and enabling certain transitory provisions for the minority areas. The Bill was passed with sixty-six votes in favour and twenty-nine votes against and was followed by protests by Tamils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The passing of this Act was to worsen the ethnic tensions in the subsequent period. The Federal Party, at its Party convention, which was held in August 1956 in Trincomalee, demanded a federal constitution with autonomy for the Northern and Eastern Provinces, parity of both Sinhalese and Tamil as well as a 'satisfactory settlement of the problem

of the Indian Tamil plantation workers in the island' (de Silva 1981: 513). It threatened to launch another satyagraha if these demands were not met by 20 August 1957. In turn Bandaranaike resorted to 'a policy of intimidation', stating that 100,000 SLFP volunteers would help the army and the police (DeVotta: 2004: 101). As Bandaranaike himself had put forward the notion of a federal political structure in the 1920s, it was, as noted by K. M. de Silva, a 'grim irony that that he should be called upon, at the moment of his greatest political triumph, to articulate the strong opposition of the Sinhalese to any attempt to establish a federal constitution', with the Sinhalese viewing the 'Tamil's demand for a federal constitution as nothing less than the thin end of the wedge of a separatist movement' (de Silva 1981: 513).

In spite of his rhetoric Bandaranaike was aware of the need for negotiations to contain the unrest, and in July 1957, the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact (B-C Pact) between the Federal Party and the government was agreed to on the condition that the satyagraha would not take place. Under this pact, Tamil would be the language of administration in the north and east, the Citizenship Acts would be reconsidered and regional councils introduced in the north and east with direct elections and devolution of power on several key issues of administration, including education, agriculture and Sinhalese colonisation in the Tamil-majority areas (DeVotta 2004: 102). This agreement sparked off protests by Sinhalese religious parties as well as the UNP, resulting in Bandaranaike tearing up the pact in front of a large crowd of protesting *bhikkhus* on 9 August 1957. But ethnic tensions increased in the subsequent period, with widespread anti-Tamil riots in May 1958, which were contained when the army and the navy were brought in by the Governor General. As a realistic response to the ethnic tensions and to 'assuage the feelings of the Tamils', the prime minister, in August 1958, gained approval in parliament for the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, which allowed the 'reasonable' use of Tamil in administration (de Silva 1981: 514–15).

ETHNIC TENSIONS AND POLITICS

In 1959, after three years in office, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike was assassinated by a monk, resulting in elections in 1960, which were won by the UNP, who, however, did not manage to get a majority support in parliament, leading to a new elections the same year. This time, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's widow, led the SLFP

successfully during the general elections of July 1960 and became the new prime minister. This victory was also the result of the enactment of the Citizenship and Franchise Acts of 1948 and 1949 that removed the right of franchise from the majority of the plantation community.

As a consequence, in 1959, constituencies were demarcated and seats allocated on the basis of population, with most of the plantation workers—who were concentrated in the Kandyan region—being disfranchised and thus unable to influence the outcomes of the elections. Such an ‘anomalous situation’ was, as argued by K. M. de Silva in favour of the Kandyans who comprised 26 per cent of the population and had 44 per cent of the seats (de Silva 1981: 525). The new government appointed Thondaman as the member of parliament representing labour interests. The SLFP was able to obtain the backing of the Federal Party on the promise that the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact would be revived, and more power given to the regional councils in return.

Once in power, however, the new prime minister ‘proved to be even more pro-Sinhalese than her husband’ and went ahead and implemented the ‘Sinhala Only’ policy (Winslow and Woost 2004: 35):

Under Mrs. Bandaranaike, courts, even in Tamil areas, were instructed to issue decisions only in Sinhala; buses were lettered in Sinhala; even post office signs were only in Sinhala. By 1961, official policy was that Sinhala was the only language of government administration.

The government declared a state of emergency in 1960 and took the principles of the ‘Sinhala Only’ Act further by deciding to drop English as an official language and to conduct all government transactions only in Sinhalese, leading to increasing polarisation between the main two ethnic groups. The Federal Party organised a satyagraha in February 1961 demanding the government keep its promises and went on to launch its own postal service on 14 April 1961. A state of emergency was then imposed and the FP leaders arrested. The subsequent period witnessed the entrenchment of ethnic chauvinism in national politics, which at times erupted into open hostility and even physical violence.

By 1964, the SLFP, keen to win the impending elections and counter the power of the UNP, sought to co-opt segments of the opposition by offering them positions in the government. It formed a no-contest pact with the LSSP and the CP and in June 1964 even gave leaders of the LSSP important portfolios in the government. Dr N. M. Perera became the Finance Minister, Cholmondeley Goonewardena, Minister of Public

Works, and Anil Moonesinghe, Minister of Communications, thus effectively splitting the United Left Front. The SLFP promised to deal with the problem of the plantation workers and also gained the support of the Federal Party that represented the interests of many Ceylon Tamils by offering to revive the B-C Pact. In doing so, Bandaranaike and her party leaders managed to bring some of major opposition parties into the SLFP-led coalition.

THE INDO-CEYLON AGREEMENT OF 1964

It was in this context that, nearly a decade after the failed agreement in 1954, the next important negotiation took place between India and Ceylon on the fate of those individuals in the Indian community who had been denied Ceylon citizenship and deprived of their franchise rights. The Indo-Ceylon Agreement of October 1964 between Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Ceylon and the Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, (often referred to as the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact) provided the granting of Indian citizenship to 525,000 persons over a fifteen-year period, the number for Ceylon citizenship being 300,000, with the fate of another 150,000 to be the subject of a subsequent agreement. The agreement was claimed as a personal triumph for Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who was greeted on her return from India with congratulations from her party. Some scholars, such as S. U. Kodikara viewed it as 'a fair and honourable settlement of a long-standing dispute' and held that Sirimavo Bandaranaike had 'achieved a great triumph of diplomacy, an honour which had eluded all her predecessors since independence' (Kodikara 1965: 143).¹ Such viewpoints, while praising the SLFP leader, paid little heed to the fact that neither the plantation community nor their leadership had been consulted on decisions regarding its future.

The two main plantations trade unions, the CWC and the DWC, viewed the negotiations as an important step towards settling the problem of statelessness but opposed them once they were concluded (V. Kanapathipillai 2005: 131–32). The Democratic Workers Congress (DWC) led by A. Aziz, which had split from the CWC, accused the Government of India of regarding the people concerned in the pact 'as a commodity rather than human beings' (*Ceylon Daily News*, 9 November

¹ Kodikara also noted, however, that the success of this agreement would 'depend on the amount of compulsion' in its implementation (1965: 142).

1964) and the Ceylon Workers Congress called it ‘an affront to human dignity’ (*Sun*, 28 November 1964) and saw serious defects in the pact. These included the lack of choice given to people as they were to be compulsory repatriated, as well as the fact that the future of 150,000 persons remained unresolved, and that even the future of 825,000 persons, who would be granted citizenship was left in ‘a state of suspense’ for a period of fifteen years (*Times of Ceylon*, 7 November 1964). What was particularly noteworthy was that some of the ex-LSSP members were also critical; Meryl Fernando stated that the government, in keeping with its ‘basically anti-working class and chauvinistic policy’, had entered into an agreement with the Indian government regarding the so-called stateless persons of Indian origin without any consultation with the people concerned, and that this was ‘a denial of democratic rights’ (*Hansard*, 26 November 1964: 132).

But the main reactions to the pact in national politics, not surprisingly, assumed ethnic overtones. The Buddhist clergy supported the government because it appeared to promote the interests of Sinhala Buddhists in the country. Concerned with the same interests, Philip Gunawardena, a leftist leader who had formed the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), however, came to a different conclusion, saying that, if implemented, the Indo-Ceylon Agreement ‘would result in the doom of the Sinhalese nation’ (*Times of Ceylon*, 4 November 1964). Leaders of the Federal Party also opposed the Pact; Amirthalingam said that it was the ‘latest blow to Tamils’ (*Ceylon Daily News*, 3 November 1964); another Federal Party leader E. M. V. Naganathan, called it a ‘further advance’ of the government’s ‘planned policy of aggressive communalism and reactionary neo-colonialism directed against the linguistic and religious minorities in this country’ (*Hansard*, 26 November 1964: 134).

The electoral significance of this step became more apparent with the prime minister’s announcement on 10 November 1964, that the persons already registered as Ceylon citizens, as well as those to be given citizenship under the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact, would be placed on a separate electoral register and would not have the right to vote at the forthcoming general elections, and that they were to select representatives ‘of their choice’ to parliament at a ‘separate election.’ (*Sun*, 11 November, 1964). She stated that preventing them from voting was intended to ‘safeguard the political interests of the indigenous population’, and that the leader of the Opposition, Dudley Senanayake, had also been consulted on this issue and had agreed on this procedure. Sirimavo Bandaranaike alleged that Indian Tamils had deprived the local Sinhalese of land and employment (Kanapathipillai 2005: 122) and referring to the election results of 1947,

said 'An alien population was thus able to affect the results in one fifth of all the constituencies of Ceylon, thereby creating a serious political problem in the Kandyan provinces' (*Hansard*, Official Report to the Senate, 10 November 1964).

An important outcome of this agreement was that the position of S. Thondaman, the president of the CWC and nominated member in the government, became increasingly untenable. He distanced himself from the 1964 agreement and expressed his censure more clearly in December 1964 when he abstained from voting in parliament in favour of Press Bill put forward by the government. With seventy-three votes in favour of the government and seventy-four against the motion, the government would have been able to remain in power if Thondaman had voted for the Bill, as with the speaker's vote on its side, the government would have had the necessary majority (Sabaratnam 1990: 90). Without his vote, the SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition fell and the government was forced to call new elections. The SLFP regarded Thondaman's vote as a betrayal of the coalition. On his part, Thondaman, having recognised the opportunity to be involved with national politics in the future, opted to support the UNP in the forthcoming elections, a move that was welcomed by the UNP as it was also aware of the strategic value of the backing of the CWC leadership.

The UNP came to power in the subsequent elections in 1965 with support from CWC and the Federal Party. The DWC allied with the SLFP-Marxist coalition for the elections but broke away shortly thereafter in response to the coalition's position on the Indo-Ceylon agreement as well as 'other issues affecting the minorities and increasingly enthusiastic advocacy of Sinhalese Buddhist claims' (Kearney 1971: 130). The CWC, under the leadership of Thondaman, supported the UNP in the elections on the understanding that the separate register would be removed and the principle of compulsory repatriation re-examined (de Silva 1981: 529). Thondaman was careful to not to risk a clash the government and did not support the DWC-organised forty-five day strike in 1966 that had demanded increased wages and a monthly cost of living allowance (Kearney 1971: 130). The reason for his position, even if he was in favour of the demand, was that he felt that clashing with the government would have 'jeopardised' the early granting of citizenship to the Indian Tamils, which he felt was more important to the Indian Tamil estate workers than the cost of living allowances. As noted by Kearney, although Thondaman 'approved of the demand he sacrificed the allowance for citizenship' (1971: 130).

According to the historian K. M. de Silva, the new prime minister, Dudley Senanayake wanted to promote 'ethnic and religious

reconciliation' as a 'keynote of his policy' in 1965 but he faced 'the most virulent campaign of ethnic hostility ever waged in Sri Lanka in recent times' (1981: 530). This resulted in a communal backlash, which was encouraged by the SLFP and the two Left parties. A Left paper argued that:

On one side was the united front of the LSSP and the CP. Only the Sinhala Buddhists supported them. Who supported the UNP? Local and foreign capitalists, Indians led by Thondaman, Tamils led by Ponnambalam, the Catholic church, Muslims who were against the trade policy of the coalition government, *thuppahi* elements who do not support our national culture, capitalist newspapers, all of them backed the UNP (*Janasathiya*, 28 March 1965 in Wanasinghe 1966).

Notable in such statements was the use of the word *thuppahi*, (a chauvinist term meaning a person of mixed origin lacking cultural roots) and the derogatory language typically associated with ultra-nationalists. For example, an article in another Left journal (*Janamathaya*, 9 April 1965), claiming that 'The Nation Grieves at Sinhala New Year', said

How can we celebrate Sinhala New Year at a time when the nation has been betrayed by an alliance of the UNP, the Catholic Church, Singleton Salmon,² Thondaman and the Federalists? ... The Sinhala nation will weep during this Sinhala New Year. The people who love the nation, the motherland and language, will lament (cited in Wanasinghe 1966: 122).

K. Jayawardena has remarked that the ethnic and religious hostility in the 1960s spread to many sections of the Sinhala population, including the working class.

It was directed mainly against the Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and Christians. Many Left leaders were responsible for promoting ethnic antagonism among the working people, even though important sections of the workers were Tamils and the Sinhala working-class included Christians (2003: 88).

Commenting on Left involvement in government over different periods, Jayawardena observed that 'Much has been spoken about the "betrayal" of the Left parties in joining coalitions with the Sri Lanka

² Singleton Salmon was the European appointed Member of Parliament and supported the government.

Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1964–65 and again in 1970–75 (2003: 86). She added that:

the real betrayal was not so much in their short period in coalition governments, but in their succumbing to chauvinism and dividing the working people along ethnic as opposed to class lines. In doing this the Left went against the basic non-racist principles it had consistently and forcefully advocated.

P. P. Devaraj, who had been linked with the Left for several years, also made the point that 'plantation Tamil workers felt distanced and alienated from the Left movement in which they had so much faith' (personal communication, 15 March 2012).

THE JVP AND PLANTATION LABOUR

In addition to the 'mainstream' Left opting for ethnic chauvinism and anti-Tamil stances in politics, some of the more extreme (and smaller) Left parties also voiced their hostility to plantation workers. The most important of these was the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) which led the 1971 insurrection in an attempt to capture state power. While it professed to be a Marxist-Leninist party, influenced by Che Guevara and Mao Zedong, one of the key elements of its ideology was Sinhala nationalism. It saw the spectre of Indian 'expansionism' as the chief obstacle to Sri Lanka's continuing independence and the plantation sector as the core factor in the stranglehold of the island by the imperialists and by India. In its indoctrination programmes, the JVP alleged that plantation workers

who had been brought by the British to serve imperialist interests, lived in the best parts of Sri Lanka and enjoyed benefits like housing, education and health facilities; their conditions and living standards were superior to those of Sinhala peasants engaged in slash-and-burn (*chena*) cultivation, and their political loyalty, cultural and social links were still with their homelands in India (Jayawardena 2003: 96).

Referring to the plantations, the JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera said in his lectures on the Five Lessons of the JVP in the late 1960s, 'The tea bush has killed and replaced the paddy plant, the rubber tree has killed and replaced the *kurakkan* plant' (J. Uyangoda, personal communication, 26 November 2014). Therefore, the plantation sector had to be destroyed

in order to build up a self-sufficient economy in Sri Lanka. The JVP lesson categorically rejected any suggestion by political groups that estate workers were potential revolutionaries or that 'illicit immigrants workers' were part of the proletariat.³ On the contrary, it alleged that these workers were only 'concerned with MGR and Indian leaders':

We cannot expect them to set up a socialist government in this country after a revolution. No! Their revolution will be to capture power and then to hand it over to India. That is clear as daylight. They will hand over this country to India, to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam or even to MGR so that he may rule Ceylon. Therefore it is obvious that a clear and fearless solution must be found for the problem of illicit immigrants and estate labour (Janatha Sangamaya 1980).

Estate Tamils, according to the JVP, spoke of Tamil Nadu as *Thainadu* (motherland) and looked up to Indian leaders. Such workers were not a part of the Sri Lankan revolution. Thus, the problem of plantation labour had to be analysed in terms of Indian 'expansionism' (Wijeweera, n.d.). In later years this policy was dropped. The JVP was strong among some of the young educated layers of the rural population, and its nationalist standpoint contributed to the growth of a wave of Sinhala ultra-nationalism. Important aspects of Sinhala consciousness in relation to the plantation workers can be seen from the JVP propaganda among Sinhala youth carried on in the late 1960s. Warnings about the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), in India were sounded by the JVP, which devoted the second of its famous *Five Lessons* to the topic of 'Indian expansionism,' also attacking Indian capitalists in the island, and raising the question of illicit immigrants, as well as Tamil cultural influences. On the question of plantation workers, the document referred to the 'privileges' in housing, education and access to food they had over the 'genuine people of this country':

In fact one could say that they enjoy privileges that the ordinary people of this country do not enjoy. The common people of this country live in

³ M. G. Ramachandran, popularly referred to as MGR, was a leading Tamil film star and later politician in Tamil Nadu in south India. Wijeweera was clear that 'If these workers are really the proletariat in their own country they should go back to that country and save that country from being exploited by their own capitalist class and by the American imperialists. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna is definitely opposed to and will definitely contest the view that estate workers are here and therefore belong here' (*Five Lessons of the JVP*).

utter destitution, in slums, and even in river mouths, having no proper place to live in. But every estate worker has a house and receives an education, and even his food is from the estate. In fact the estate supplies him with all his needs of life. Life is not difficult for him. But the genuine people of this country and their children have no employment, no fixed employment, and no permanent abode.

The JVP sharply denounced the 'We Tamil' and local DMK movements and repeated wild stories about Tamil conquests in order to shock and arouse the Sinhalese in the *Five Lessons*:

Recently in 1969 a Tamil pusari called Kundakudi Adikalar had come to Ceylon and stated that Ceylon had once been a Tamil kingdom and that they should fight to win it back. M.G.R., an actor, has stated that he will never sleep in peace until he comes to Ceylon, marries a Ceylonese girl, becomes King of Ceylon and rides round Colombo on the back of a white horse. These are the views that the Tamil imperialists have put forward.

Examples were also given of the possibility of plantation workers led by the 'We Tamil' movement being trained in armed struggle. However, the use of culture as a weapon was seen as the most insidious element of the threat; it was alleged that Tamils owned the cinema companies in the country, that they imported Tamil films, thereby not only depriving local films of screening time, but also deliberately showing MGR films on plantations and in remote Sinhala villages. It was also suggested that films depicting battle scenes were shown to estate workers to make them militant, while Sinhalese youth were intentionally shown films on love in order to 'weaken our people's culture.' Specific reference was made to two MGR films: *Arasa Kattalai*, which showed MGR conquering a country and *Adimai Pen*, where MGR subjugates a country ruled by a woman, 'devised ... with our country in view.'⁴

⁴ 'In this way they have made the cinema their medium of propagating their imperialistic ideas among the people. It is for this purpose that they bring films from abroad, most of them Tamil films. It is MGR who wins every battle. It is MGR who becomes their one and only leader. Even if you go to remote villages in Ceylon you will find our Sinhalese youth applauding whenever the name of MGR is mentioned. MGR receives greater adulation than our own popular leaders like Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake' (*Five Lessons*, Lesson 2).

FROM INDIAN TAMILS TO MALAYAHA TAMILS

The exposure to ethnic hostility in the 1950 and early 1960s resulted in greater awareness amongst the plantation workers of their identity as a specific Tamil-speaking community in the country. But this linguistic link did not bridge the significant differences between the plantation community and the Tamils in the North and East of the country. Besides their distinct histories in Ceylon, the plantation community constituted largely of workers and families who had little in common with the class and caste hierarchies that existed among the 'Ceylon Tamils'. The two groups also had their own particular political demands and priorities. The most crucial contrast however, lay in their entitlement to citizenship in independent Ceylon, a status that was automatically conferred on Ceylon Tamils, but denied to the vast majority of the plantation community under laws that were even supported by the Tamil Congress in parliament.

In the nomenclature, the plantation workers were classified as 'Indian Tamils' or 'People of Recent Indian Origin': terms that stressed their Indian connection. But confrontation with anti-Tamil aggression in Ceylon gave rise to the development of a specific and unique ethnic identity in the plantation community. From the 1960s, the term Malayaha Tamils (up-country Tamils) was used by youth groups, organisations and movements to distinguish the plantation community from the Tamils in the North and East of the country (Lawrence 2011: 14). Some of the most important organisations included the Malayaha Illaignar Munnani (Up-country Youth Front, Malayaha Illaignar Peravai (Up-country Youth Forum), Malayaha Makkal Iyakkam (Up-country People's Movement, the Malayaha Vegu Jana Iyakkam (Up-country Mass Movement and the Malayaha Iyakkiya Illaignar Munnani (Up-country United Youth Front). According to Lawrence (2011), the important aspect of using the term Malayaha Tamil as an 'identity concept' was that it arose from within the community itself and was 'integral to their historical consciousness and self-understanding as a community'.

ETHNIC CHAUVINISM IN POLITICS

This chapter has outlined how the rise of ethnic chauvinism in national politics was accompanied by populist policies that appealed to the Sinhala Buddhist constituency while consciously fostering consciousness anti-Tamil sentiments. As the vast majority of the plantation workers were Tamil-speaking, they too experienced ethnic hostility from sections of

the Sinhalese community who viewed all Tamils as a threat to Sinhala sovereignty. There were however, significant differences, particularly in terms of caste, class and citizenship, between the Tamils in the North and the East, which were often subsumed under the overarching anti-Tamil rhetoric that was used by the main Sinhala parties, including the Left, to demonstrate their Sinhala Buddhist credentials, and hopefully thereby obtain the votes of the Sinhalese in the subsequent elections. The Indo-Ceylon agreement of 1964, which was the most important pact on the fate of the 'stateless', was essentially part of the politics of the broader ethnic divides in the country. The reality was that the decision-making process continued to reflect the growing ethnic tensions and serious democratic deficits in the country as neither the members of the plantation community nor even its leadership had any voice in the negotiations that affected their citizenship and future.

But like many victims of systematic marginalisation and injustice there grew amongst the plantation community an increasing awareness of their own independent identity and status in society and politics. It was clear that their homeland and primary allegiance lay not in their ties with India as their place of origin, nor with the Tamils in the North and East with whom they had a linguistic connection, but rather with a specific geographical location in the hills in the centre of Ceylon. It was a region associated with the plantation development for which their ancestors had migrated several decades earlier but which had not been their permanent home and base at the time. These ideas were to influence both the trade union movement and plantation politics in the subsequent period.

'Bare Subsistence to Grinding Poverty'¹

Like bad monsoons, malnutrition was something to be sorry about. But nothing positive was done about it. The main thing was that the estates were 'doing very well' cholera and malnutrition notwithstanding. They were churning out endless quantities of tea and rubber. A year passed. A year of productivity.

Gopal Gandhi (1989: 93).

All I remember of this Sirima period is pancham[starvation] and pini [disease].

Ms. Nagamma, estate worker, Nuwara Eliya
(Kanapathipillai 2009: 140).

Debates regarding nationalisation of the plantations had started shortly after Independence. It had the full support of all the Marxist parties who viewed it as an essential anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist demand. By the 1960s, many foreign planters and companies began to sell their assets, leading to a gradual 'Ceylonisation' in the ownership of estates. As a result, more companies began to manage their estates on a 'care and maintenance' basis, cutting down productive investment, neglecting replanting and other cultivation practices, leading to the physical deterioration of estates (Kurian 1989: 205). Management practices to cut the cost of production were common on the plantations. They included cutting down on the number of days of work, particularly in the lean period, a practice that was illegal as per the 1889 Labour Ordinance, which had guaranteed 108 days of work. Plantation ownership was now shifting some of the costs of maintaining the plantation population on to the workers.

¹ K. M. de Silva 1981: 552.

As noted in Chapter 14, plantation workers and trade unions continued their agitation for labour rights in the 1960s even after they had been politically disenfranchised. These actions persisted under the United Front government as workers protested against the non-payment and postponement of wages.² Such cases were to become more numerous as fears of nationalisation increased.³ Increasingly, there were strikes on the issue of unemployment, directly connected to the shortage of work on estates. In some cases, police intervened in these strikes, resulting in the deaths of workers. This worsening of management-labour relations also brought together different unions on the plantations as they condemned police brutality.⁴

LAND REFORMS

It was in the aftermath of these tensions as well as the agitation regarding the 1972 Constitution that the United Front government initiated land reforms. It has been argued that the immediate impetus for these land reforms was the armed uprising by the JVP in April 1971, which made the government aware that measures needed to be undertaken to deal with the problems of youth unemployment—an important motive behind the insurrection (V. Kanapathipillai 2005: 163–64). At the same time,

² Five hundred fifty workers went on strike on Girindielle Estate, Kandy, on 25 February 1971, protesting against the sale of the estate without satisfactory provision for the payment of termination benefits, in respect of their past services, and for terms and conditions of employment in the future.

³ For instance, the entire labour force of Dodantalawa estate, Kandy, struck work on 19 February 1971, demanding the payment of their earned wages for January 1971. On 27 February 1971, the entire labour force of 800 workers of Madulkele estate went on strike demanding payment of their January and February wages. On St Margaret's estate, Udu Pussellawa, 300 workers went on strike on 17 March for non-payment of their earned wages. On Newton estate, Dickoya, 200 workers went on strike, from 12 March, due to the refusal of the management to pay their wages. Notable in this respect were the protests by workers at the Velana estate, Matale, who struck work in protest against the management, which had engaged outside labour to work in the factory on a holiday, ignoring the permanent workers. Again, 75 workers went on strike at St Leonard's estate from 17 February 1971, demanding that the management give employment on the estate to resident workers' children.

⁴ A meeting organised by the CWC, LEWU, UPWU, CPWU, DWC, CESU and NUW on 2 February 1971 protested against the shooting of workers on the Keenakelle and Nalanda estates.

staunch advocates for the nationalisation of the plantations—particularly members of the LSSP—had joined the government and found it an opportune moment to also implement the land reform policy.

In 1972, the Land Reform Law was passed, placing a ceiling of twenty hectares (nearly fifty acres) on private ownership of land. This was followed by the Land Reform (Amendment) Law in 1975 which brought all plantations owned by local and foreign public companies under state control and established a Land Reform Commission to implement the reform.⁵ By 1976 the two main state corporations—the Janatha Estate Development Board (JEDB) and the Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation (SLSPC)—controlled some 47 per cent of the expropriated land (Kurian 1989:207).⁶

Plantation workers, who expected their conditions to improve in the light of assurances on the part of the relevant ministers, had initially welcomed the nationalisation of the estates. They were, however, to become 'disillusioned' and 'frustrated' according to the General Secretary of the CWC, S. Sellasamy, as conditions deteriorated. Workers were not paid for the work done, benefits were denied to them and schools and dispensaries were shut down, resulting in unmitigated tyranny where workers were made victims (*Congress News*, September 1976: 3). As Sellasamy claimed: 'Even in the worst days of private sector ownership they did not find such attempts being made to weaken the working class. But now a government was adopting measures which even the worst capitalist regime would spurn' (*Congress News*, September 1976).

In October 1973, a new phase in political agitation developed with the government decision to reduce rice rations and restrict the flour ration to one pound a week. These were part of the cutbacks on food subsidies and welfare in line with controlling inflation. While all groups

⁵ Under the 1972 legislation, the government acquired 228,009 hectares and under the 1975 amendment, it acquired 169,145 hectares. However, the viability and profitability of plantation production had become highly questionable by the time nationalisation took place (Kurian 1989: 194). The remaining land was under the authority of different bodies (electoral cooperatives and the Usawasama). The experience with cooperative farms was on the whole unsuccessful although the ideology behind the policy had been based on workers' participation (Kurian 1989: 207).

⁶ The Usawasama were specifically established with the aim of developing a cooperative management. The electoral cooperatives and the Janawasa were also attempts to introduce a new form of management, the former being placed under the control of local politicians and the latter being based on collective responsibility. The Usawasama failed.

in the country were affected, the plantation workers were among the most vulnerable, and death from starvation was not unknown on the estates. People pawned their jewels and utensils, and children were sometimes sent to work as domestic servants in urban areas, often under exploitative conditions. Begging became common. The price of the basic items in the worker's diet increased by some 500 per cent between 1970 and 1974.

The increase in the cost of food can gauged from Table 17.1.

TABLE 17.1: INCREASE IN FOOD PRICES

	1970 (Rs)	1974 (Rs)
Rice (1 measure)	1.00	6.00
Coconut (each)	0.15–0.20	0.75–0.90
Sugar (1 lb)	0.72	5.00
Kerosene Oil (1 gal)	0.72	3.60
Green Gram (1 lb)	0.70	6.00

Source: *Congress News*, 15 April 1974.

Even A. Aziz, the President of the DWC, who had previously been appointed MP by the SLFP-led government, spoke out on the issue of the food crisis on the plantations, stating that the workers did not get enough flour or rice and that they were starving (A Aziz, personal communication, January 1988). The historian K. M. de Silva noted that 'While all sections of the population felt the impact of the inflationary pressures of the 1970s, their effect on the plantation workers was most devastating—a precipitous decline from a bare subsistence to grinding poverty' (1981: 552, emphasis added). It was a moment that called for joint trade union action as the level of deprivation in the plantations reached a crisis level.

The Joint Committee of Plantation Trade Unions⁷ adopted a resolution demanding sufficient food, a monthly wage of Rs 180 and an interim monthly allowance of Rs 20. Furthermore, protests were made by urban trade unions and a joint letter was sent by five trade unions (including the Ceylon Workers Congress) and two federations to discuss the problem.⁸ They noted that 'the 10% increase in wages

⁷ The Joint Committee of Plantation Trade Unions comprised the Ceylon Estate Staff's Union, the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union, the National Workers Congress, the New Red Flag Union, the Agricultural and Plantation Workers Congress, the Illankai Thoilalar Kalagiam and the Hill Country Workers Union.

⁸ The Ceylon Workers' Congress, Ceylon Mercantile Union, Ceylon Estate Staffs' Union, Central Council of Ceylon Trade Unions and Lanka Jathika Estate Workers' Union, the Agricultural and Plantation Workers' Congress and the Public Service Technical Officers' Trade Union Federation.

ordered by the Government' was not sufficient to 'obtain adequate food to maintain themselves and their families at the nutritional level necessary for their health and working capacity' (*Congress News*, 1 November 1973). As far as the plantation workers were concerned, the reduction of rations had been drastic; the normal consumption of rice and flour was reduced from eight pounds per person per week to only two pounds, resulting from the cuts in rations and the lack of availability of sufficient bread or other food in plantation areas. The *Congress News* noted mentioned that vast numbers were 'living under conditions of semi-starvation.'

A qualitative change in the protests came with the involvement of some non-plantation trade unions and groups. The *Aththa* newspaper, representing the views of the Communist Party, reported that the estate workers suffered most in this process:

The worst affected by the food restriction are the workers and those who suffer most are the estate workers. The villagers have food substitutes that are grown in rural areas to meet their food requirement at least to some extent. The urban worker has access to supplementary food items coming from villages even though they have to pay high prices ... But in the estate areas even these items are not available. Estate workers have no other way of finding extra food ... It is therefore important that Government pays consideration to these workers (*Aththa*, Editorial, 8 November 1973).

A satyagraha was organised by opposition parties on 13 November 1973 at Nuwara Eliya to protest the food shortage. A range of opposition leaders, including the leader of the opposition, J. R. Jayewardene and the president of the Ceylon Workers Congress, S. Thondaman participated in this action.⁹ The *Congress News* was scathing in its attack on government policy in this regard:

if ... slashing the food rations of the plantation worker was to force him to die slowly and thereby find solutions to the many problems stemming from him, then we must say that the Government has succeeded in its attempt. The starvation conditions created by the food shortage and the

⁹ Others included R. Premadasa, the first MP for Colombo Central, W. Dahanayake, MP for Galle, Prins Gunasekera, MP for Habaraduwa, E. L. Seenanayake, MP for Kandy, Gamani Dissanayake, MP for Nuwara Eliya, V. Dharmalingam MP for Uduvil, V. Appamalay, M. Arunasalam, vice president of the CWC and M. S. Sellasamy, general secretary of the CWC, Rukman Senanayake, MP for Dedigama (*Congress News*, 15 November 1973).

fall in incomes of the estate worker is fast decimating the population of the plantations. If the death rate continues to remain at the present level, we have no doubt that even the most vexed of the problems confronting the two countries on either side of Palk Straits, namely the question of stateless persons could be substantially solved (15 November 1974).

In 1975, the Coordinating Secretariat for Plantation Areas reported on a study by Dr Brian Seneviratne of Peradeniya University which showed that the major health problems of plantation workers were the consequence of malnutrition and under nourishment, including anaemia, protein malnutrition and 'an almost total lack of food' (Seneviratne 1975). He said that despite 'repeated government claims that there have been no deaths from starvation in this country, I have had several patients admitted to my ward who are in advance stages of starvation of whom some have died' (*Congress News*, 15 February 1975). These views were similar to those expressed by the head of the Planters Association Estate Health Schemes, Dr C. V. R. Fernando, who claimed that at the death rate on estates had doubled due to malnutrition. The *Planters Association Review* of February 1975 also stated the death rate in 1974 was double that of the same period in 1973. As there was no major epidemic, this high death rate 'could only be attributed to malnutrition and starvation. The increase in the number of deaths was most marked in the case of elderly people and infants' (*Congress News*, 15 February 1975).

The plight of the workers was also highlighted by the Report of the Commission on the Agency Houses and Brokering Firms chaired by Bernard Soysa. It noted that there were 'significantly higher' levels of general mortality as well as infant mortality and maternal mortality on the estates as compared to the all-Island rates, with wages being 'kept at a minimum in order to enhance profits' (*Congress News*, 15 August 1975: 4). The report observed that any wage rises that might have occurred due to pressure by the government and the trade unions were inadequate in relation to wages for comparable types of work. It asserted that the low wages on estates were related to the 'totalitarian' character of the plantation and its system of 'labour regimentation of a "captive" labour force' (*Congress News*, 15 August 1975: 4).

MONTHLY WAGE AGITATION

These problems stimulated the increasing demand for a monthly wage for plantation workers. While this demand had been brought up as early as

1966, little had been done about implementing it. In the wake of increasing deprivation on the estates, the demand assumed increasing significance and became a rallying point for all the plantation trade unions.

The monthly wage demand (for Rs 180) was initially put forward by the Ceylon Workers Congress in 1973 as part of a broader set of issues that were important for the plantation workers, including the removal of discrimination between women and men rubber tappers, and gratuity payment at the rate of one month's wages for each year of service. (*Congress News*, 15 January 1973). This demand was also included in an Action Programme formulated by a joint committee of thirteen trade unions whose membership was drawn from the estates, public corporation and the mercantile sector, which also highlighted the restriction on the rights of freedom of association and other trade union activities for plantation workers and the rise in the cost of living (*Congress News*, Vol. VI, No, 15 August 1973). Even several pro-government unions decided to stage a token seven day strike to protest the failure of their negotiations with the government and the employers to win for their members a monthly wage of Rs 142.50. The CWC decided to support this strike with a separate demand for a minimum monthly wage of Rs 180 for plantation workers.

Several trade unions on the plantations came together under the umbrella of the Joint Committee of Plantation Trade Unions (JCPTU) on these issues. The JCPTU decided to launch a ten day token strike starting from 18 December 1973 demanding: (a) a reasonable monthly wage, (b) the restoration of rice rations to the pre-October levels, (c) a decrease in the price of flour and sugar, and the (d) the non-displacement of estate staff as a result of acquisition of estates. Just before the strike, the Communist Party newspaper *Aththa* editorial appealed to the government to deal with the 'tragedy of plantation workers.' It said that apart from unemployed persons, 'those suffering most are the tragic and unfortunate plantation workers. They receive no monthly wage. They do not get work daily. They get a beggarly wage only for the days they work.' Furthermore, it argued that if the government could increase the basic wage of Wellawatte textile workers by a gazetted notification 'why cannot the suffering of the innocent estate workers be similarly eliminated?' (*Congress News*, 1 January 1974.) In calling for the strike the JCPTU noted:

The current position of plantation workers is that they are called upon to labour on an income that was establishing a permanent level of poverty. The curtailment of foodstuffs in terms of the government measure, made the obtaining of a monthly wage for plantation workers a matter of survival (*Congress News*, 1 January 1974).

Around 600,000 workers belonging to the eight unions comprising the JCPTU as well as several thousand workers who defied pro-government leadership participated in the strike (*Congress News*, 1 January 1974). The United Plantation Workers Union and the Communist Party trade unions also participated in the first day of the strike. On 14 December 1974 members of the JCPTU met the Minister of Plantation Industries, Colvin R. de Silva to discuss their concerns and were informed that they were being considered. A number of trade unions from the non-plantation sector also supported the strike. The Ceylon Mercantile Union asked its members to join the token strike on 20 December in support of the demands of the plantation workers (*Congress News*, 1 January 1974). The Union of Posts and Telecommunication Officers pledged its complete support for the plantation workers in their struggle to obtain a monthly wage and noted that the plantation workers formed the 'backbone of the country's economy and their legitimate and humane cause needs the support of the entire working people and hence our whole-hearted support'.¹⁰ The strike was called off on 28 December with an ultimatum presented to the government that it would be resumed if positive steps were not taken by 31 March 1974.

The Democratic Workers Congress called a series of meetings on 10 April where the members said that they wanted time till 19 April 1974 to get a mandate for the demands of the JCPTU. Subsequently, the Committee of Plantation Trade Unions (CPTU) was formed to coordinate the activities of all the plantation trade unions. They met on 10 April and 20 May and submitted another list of demands that included a reasonable monthly wage and a supply of food at fair prices to the plantation workers.

In July 1974, the government responded by offering the possibility of providing 108 days of work in six months, in place of a regular monthly wage. The JCPTU pointed out that the existing 1889 Labour Ordinance already guaranteed this stipulation, and that the issue was rather that minimum wages were totally inadequate. As the food situation worsened, workers even resorted to begging and were removed from the estates. Estate workers in Badulla and Passara were forcibly put into lorries and taken to the Eastern Province and left stranded. This had been brought to the notice of the prime minister. A *Congress News* editorial commented that these events raised serious doubts as to whether 'principles of universal kindness, mercy compassion and

¹⁰ *Congress News*, 1 January 1974. The Public Service Technical Officers' Trade Union Federation also stated that 'it was in complete agreement with the demands made by the plantation workers' and supported the token strike.

tolerance enunciated by the Enlightened One' had been 'jettisoned for political expediency.' As it noted:

If these workers were looking emaciated or appeared to be walking towards their grave ... means should have been provided for them to obtain more food and better wages. But instead of that, instead of eliminating the cause of the problem some ... seem to [believe] that it would be better to eliminate the victims of the problem than the problem itself ... While it is true that beggarly looking workers in the tattered rags are no ornament to any town, the solution lies not in transplanting them into the jungles or making them fodder for wild animals. The root causes of their problem must be eliminated (*Congress News*, 1 August 1974).

On 14 November 1974 the food problems on the estates were taken up in parliament. One of the MPs who spoke about destitution among the estate workers was Gamini Ariyatileke, member of parliament for Maskeliya and a part of the government coalition, who said that three workers in his electorate had died of starvation. A. Aziz the president of the Democratic Workers Congress also told the assembly that poverty had reduced workers to beggary and prostitution.

At the same time, the policy of estate land alienation created new insecurities for the plantation workers. Land and work on the estates were increasingly given to Sinhalese from the surrounding areas as part of the official policy of increasing employment. However, this was sometimes at the cost of the resident Tamil population, as the latter were often expelled and replaced by the Sinhalese workers (V. Kanapathipillai 2005: 174). The situation only worsened over time. By December 1976, the *Congress News* decried the government's 'perpetuation of a pernicious programme of village expansion and land alienation', which had resulted in large numbers of plantation workers and their families and dependants facing 'poverty, destitution and untimely death' (*Congress News*, 1 December 1976: 1).

Equally important was the removal by the government of the trade union rights of the workers, the rationalisation being that after nationalisation there was no need for separate unions to take care of their interests. Clearly this was viewed with some scepticism by the trade unions themselves; and the *Congress News*, representing the views of the CWC, made the following point in an editorial:

The declared object of acquiring estates is to increase productivity. Whether such an event comes within the realms of reality under the

present circumstances, is a matter of conjecture! What is certain is that unless the authorities responsible for the management of these estates square up to the inevitability of the existence of trade unions and make an attempt to enlist their co-operation to run these estates, their viability must remain a pipe-dream (*Congress News*, 15 November 1974).

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

The systematic denial of economic and labour rights of the plantation works brought about a degree of joint cooperation among most of the plantation trade unions and there were instances of even the pro-government unions taking part in protests. As the tensions increased in this sector, the government promulgated certain regulations in October 1975, which would have allowed the eviction of persons from the estate if this was considered 'necessary' for public order. Furthermore, such evictions were not to be questioned in any court or tribunal. The unions were justifiably incensed at these regulations and compared them to the criminal trespass laws that were used in the 'hey day of the Planters' Raj' to evict workers, usually trade union activists (*Congress News* 1975, 15 November 1975: 1). Under these circumstances, the *Congress News* commented:

it defies the imagination and every process of logical reasoning as to why the government found it necessary to introduce Emergency Regulations of a character, scope and content that have no relevance to the socialistic policies pursued by the government (15 November 1975).

The regulations were also condemned by NGOs and religious organisation working with the plantation workers and the Kandyan peasantry. The Centre for Society and Religion (which was linked to the Catholic church) found that these regulations tended to 'vest dictatorial powers in the head of State Authorities who could abuse them with impunity while the workers will have no means of redress in case of any miscarriage of justice' (*Congress News*, 15 December 1975). These protests culminated in a meeting held by members of six plantation unions¹¹ on 30 November 1975. The speakers included N. Sanmugathan and

¹¹ The Ceylon Workers' Congress, the New Red Flag Union, the Lanka Jatika Estate Workers Union, the National Workers Congress, Ceylon Workers Kazhagam and the Agricultural Workers' Congress.

M. S. Thambirajah of the New Red Flag Union, W. C. Ratnayake of the Lanka Jatkika Estate Workers Union and N. Vellayan from the National Workers' Congress. Such was the united and resounding opposition that the government was forced to withdraw the regulations in December of the same year.

In addition, there were increasing instances of workers who had been given citizenship challenging the policies of the government and asserting their rights to land and employment. One example was when the government in 1976 had decided to expel all the Tamil resident workers at Choisy estate, Punduloya, with the intention of redistributing the land to the Sinhalese. The workers and the unions protested with strike action, and those who had obtained citizenship also applied for land. In some cases, the management, fearing that the estates would be ruined, also protested against the handover of land to villagers (Nadesan 1993: 225). At a meeting in 1976 at Ramboda, S. Thondaman, the president of the CWC noted that 'when the plantation workers were stateless, they were only voteless; while when they gained citizenship they were both 'jobless and homeless' (*Congress News*, 1 October 1976: 1).

By 1976, matters turned both violent and openly communal and there were instances when force, usually with the help of armed thugs, was used to remove the plantation workers from the estate land, resulting in the destruction of crops and burning of huts (*Congress News*, 1 November 1976: 4). On 11 March 1977, the Commissioner of Labour issued a note at a conference of all trade unions, indicating that the government's policy of alienation on estates had to be accepted by every person and saying that they had to cooperate in the implementation of this policy. Reacting to the land policies carried out in Kandy, Gampola and Pussellawa areas, the *Satyodaya Bulletin* warned of their danger, saying that given the way land alienation had been pursued, it seemed that the policy was to 'displace the Tamils in order to make room for the Sinhala peasants, creating communal tensions in the plantation areas' (*Satyodaya Bulletin* 49, April 1977). Such a policy was also viewed by Thondaman as smacking of 'flagrant racial discrimination' as it tended to 'destitute a section of the working people, merely because they are Tamils and of Indian origin' (*Congress News*, 15 January 1977).

ETHNIC TENSIONS AND ECONOMIC INSECURITY

Apart from prevailing ethnic tensions that had spread since the 1950s in the country, the period from 1970 to 1977 was also noted for the severe

economic hardships that plantation workers experienced as a consequence of increasing employment insecurity, worsening labour conditions, widespread poverty and starvation. In many ways, as we have seen, the problems the workers experienced went far beyond the denial of their labour and democratic rights and challenged their basic existence and their very right to life, in ways that were reminiscent of the early slave plantations where the workers were viewed as dispensable. These problems were also associated with the consequences of the land reforms undertaken by the United Front government led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike and the ensuing discrimination that the plantation workers faced in terms of work, pay and benefits. Such practices were further linked to the government's priority of appeasing the Sinhalese majority, who were also affected by unemployment, particularly in the rural areas. While much hope had been in the 'progressive' slogan of nationalisation, it was ironic that for the plantation workers it decimated their access to basic needs and rights.

In many ways, the period from 1970 to 1977 was the 'worst of times' for the workers on the plantations. It was a reversion to the slave-like conditions of the past. Plantation workers were the targets of systematic economic, political and ethnic discrimination. Their union leadership was not consulted in most of the relevant policies affecting the sector, many of their labour rights were challenged through the government regulations and they experienced widespread poverty and destitution. The cumulative effect of these different forms of exploitation was to bring about a qualitative change in addressing these concerns, with militancy and strike action increasingly becoming a clear option for many, and more particularly for the youth on plantations.

eighteen

Political Concessions, Open Economy and Militancy

... the plantation workers, innocent of any crime, were singled out for murder and mayhem, [which] created a feeling among the people that the thousands of hooligans covertly enjoy the patronage of powerful personalities, and that the incidents were planned, and orchestrated by unseen hands.

Statement of the Wave of Violence in Sri Lanka August 1981,
adopted by the National Council of the Ceylon Workers' Congress,
Colombo, 29 August 1981.

The hardships experienced by the plantation workers as a consequence of the Land Reforms undertaken in 1972 and 1975 increased their opposition to the ruling SLFP coalition. It was not surprising under these circumstances that in spite of its more capitalist orientation they supported the main opposition party, the United National Party (UNP) in the 1977 elections. While this alliance provided them room to negotiate for some political concessions when the UNP-led government came into power in 1977, the period between 1977 and 1983 was also marked by the escalation of ethnic tensions with plantation workers being targeted and attacked as part of the ensuing anti-Tamil violence.

THE UNP VICTORY

The election manifesto of the UNP in the 1977 elections expressed the aim of creating a *Dharmishta Samajaya* (righteous society) by providing a government that was 'efficient, free from corruption, and fair to all, irrespective of political beliefs' and stressing that it was 'not only a democratic party [but] also a socialist party.' In adopting this platform,

the UNP, under the leadership of the J. R. Jayewardene, tried to counter its image as a pro-western conservative capitalist party and 'sought to appropriate the very language of morality that has been used against them by claiming that they were actually a socialist party' (Venugopal 2011: 91). Such an appeal proved effective in attracting many votes from the rural poor for the UNP at the 1977 elections, the first to be held under the 1972 Republican Constitution. The new government, led by the United National Party under J. R. Jayewardene, commanded a five-sixths majority in parliament, with 139 seats.

The UNP manifesto had also noted that the Tamil-speaking minorities experienced 'numerous problems', and that the party would take 'possible steps to remedy their grievances', and would also call an all-party conference to find a solution to the worsening ethnic tensions that existed between the Tamils in the North and East and the Sinhalese in the rest of the island (Abeynaike 1993: 254–56). But appealing to the Tamil electorate was less successful. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which had been formed in 1976 and included the main Tamil parties—the All Ceylon Tamil Congress and the Federal Party—won eighteen seats and Appapillai Amithalingam became leader of the Opposition. The leader of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, S. Thondaman, while being one of the presidents of the TULF, nevertheless did not agree with its demand for a separate Tamil state (Eelam) and stood on behalf of the CWC, winning a seat in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya constituency.

POST-ELECTION VIOLENCE

The holding of elections in a time of heightened ethnic tensions resulted in the process being marked by aggression and fighting. Within a month of the July elections in 1977, there was a two week period of violence during which the estate Tamil workers were often the brunt of Sinhalese attacks. While the initial attacks were associated with post-election frustration, Sinhala groups soon targeted the Tamils in the country. Violence was experienced all over the island and concentrated in the southern and central parts of the country. In many cases, plantation workers became a 'natural' target of anti-Tamil violence as they resided in the centre of the island surrounded by Sinhala villages. A one-man inquiry committee chaired by M. C. Sansoni (former Chief Justice) was appointed by the President to investigate the violence that occurred between 13 August and 15 September 1977. The Sansoni Commission

Report¹ provided important evidence of the displacement, shooting, arson and physical violence on several estates in 'a wave of communal terrorism' (Sansoni Commission Report, 1980: 269).

The CWC was vociferous in its condemnation of both the communal violence as well as the role of the government in dealing with the problem. The statement adopted by the CWC on the August 1977 disturbances attacked the government for its inadequacy in protecting the workers. The attitude of the government, according to the CWC, to the 'reign of terror that was unleashed in August against the Tamils' reflected 'a lamentable lack of understanding of the dimensions of the sufferings and the gravity of the repercussions that the victims had been exposed to.' The statement also noted that there had been no 'unequivocal condemnation' of the violence by political party leaders. It implicated the state and its officials for 'dereliction of duty' and alleged that politicians were intervening to free 'miscreants'.² The CWC also decried the Indian government, which had 'acted the role of a passive spectator' when the workers on estates were attacked in May 1977 and accused it of taking action only after 'mass demonstrations' had been undertaken in Tamil Nadu (Ceylon Workers Congress 1977: 2).

CWC REPRESENTATION IN CABINET

It was in this context that the new government made a move that was viewed as an 'effective breaking of the 30-year political embargo against the people of recent Indian origin.' The president of the Ceylon Workers Congress, S. Thondaman, was invited by J. R. Jayewardene in 1978 to join the cabinet.³ He accepted this position, viewing it as a means of 'securing the rights of the Tamil community of recent Indian origin which still suffered many disabilities' (Thondaman 1987: 168). He became the Minister of Rural Industrial Development. He had also been assured by J. R. Jayewardene that an early solution to the statelessness problem would be found by the government 'at an appropriate time' and that the matter should be left in his hands (personal communication, P. P. Devaraj, 21 March 2012).

¹ The Sansoni Commission Report, Sessional Paper No. VII, July 1980.

² Ceylon Workers Congress, 'Statement adopted by the Joint Meeting of the National Council and the Executive Council of the Ceylon Workers Congress held on 24th and 25th September 1977', Colombo, 1977.

³ Ceylon Workers Congress, *Report of Activities 1971-81*, Colombo, 1982, p. 29.

The inclusion of S. Thondaman in the cabinet was a calculated political decision on the part of J. R. Jayewardene. The CWC had already expressed its reservations to a separate state for Tamils and Thondaman's inclusion in the cabinet narrowed the possibility of a united Tamil front in opposition. At the same time, Thondaman, as leader of the CWC, had de facto control of significant numbers of voters in the plantation areas. This was largely due to the speeded up repatriation process under the Sirimavo-Gandhi Agreement of 1974, whereby more of the 'stateless' plantation workers began to have voting rights, and made an important impact on the voting patterns in their areas. As a minister, Thondaman was likely to strengthen the popular base of the UNP-led government as most of the plantation workers felt that with their leader in the Cabinet they had a better chance of achieving their demands and were thus more likely to support government policies.

Such a move was seen by the CWC as advantageous in many ways. Having a member of parliament and a minister in the cabinet gave it increased opportunities to deal with the historical economic, social and political problems that had plagued the plantation workers for decades. More specifically, such an involvement also provided an opportunity for bringing up the citizenship issue for the remaining 'stateless' persons. The UNP had been sympathetic to the demands of the CWC during its previous term of office, and had passed the Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Implementation) Act of 1967 during the tenure of the Dudley Senanayake government, granting Sri Lankan citizenship according to the accepted ratio of 4:7 irrespective of the physical repatriation of the latter category. This Act had been amended in 1971⁴ by the United Front government, reintroducing the need for the physical repatriation of those with Indian citizenship in order to confer Ceylon citizenship on others, and also prohibiting (on the risk of imprisonment) employment of persons liable to be repatriated to India from Ceylon. A promise to reinstate the original provisions of the 1967 Act had been made to Thondaman by J. R. Jayewardene in 1977 after the elections (P. P. Devaraj, personal communication, 22 October 2010). In addition, the severe economic hardships of the 1970-77 period under the previous Bandaranaike government had made the plantation workers and the CWC leadership more inclined to oppose the parties associated with the United Front government. Finally, such a position also opened ways to influence government policy regarding increasing ethnic tensions in the country. As co-president of the TULF, Thondaman had clearly expressed

⁴ Indo-Ceylon Agreement Implementation (Amendment) No. 43 of 1971.

his disquiet regarding the political discrimination experienced by Tamils in the country and would try to gain concessions in this regard.

THE 1978 CONSTITUTION

At the outset, the UNP government, having ceded to the political demands of the CWC leadership and the TULF opposition, made concessions with regard to some of the discriminatory features of the 1972 Constitution. A new constitution was enacted in 1978 removing some of the more contentious features of the previous constitution, particularly with regard to language. While Sinhala continued to be the official language, Tamil was also accepted by the 1978 Constitution as a 'national language.' Moreover, while Sinhala was to be the language of administration and the language of the courts throughout Sri Lanka, there was provision for Tamil to also be used for administrative purposes and in the transaction of business by public institutions, for all laws to be published in both languages, and for the exercise of original jurisdiction in Tamil in the northern and eastern provinces.

In the 1978 Constitution, the 'foremost place' of Buddhism was constitutionally reaffirmed, and Buddhist religious institutions were to be 'protected and fostered.' All religions, however, were guaranteed 'freedom of thought, conscience and ... religious speech and expression' (Article 9). Thus, the two constitutions of 1972 and 1978 recognised the special role of Sinhala Buddhism in the life of the country, in effect giving legitimacy to the demands of the Sinhala Buddhists that had been gathering strength for a period of over a century.

In the 1978 Constitution the distinction between 'citizen' and 'person' was modified to give more entitlements to persons: persons were granted freedom of thought, conscience and religion. They were equal before the law, had access to shops, hotels and places of worship, and could not be subject to torture or cruel punishments, or arrested or punished except according to due process of the law, and were presumed innocent until proved guilty. Citizens and persons with ten years' continuous residence were to be free of discrimination on grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion and place of birth, and were to be entitled to the freedom of speech, publication, peaceful assembly, association, movement, promotion of own culture and the freedom to engage in lawful occupations.

The Constitution of 1978 also abolished the distinction between 'citizenship by descent' and 'citizenship by registration.' This meant

that plantation workers, the vast majority of whom, if given citizenship, were in the latter category—were now given nominal recognition and an equal status. In reality, this measure did not provide any extra privileges to these people as the deletion of this distinction was considered in many ways obsolete. The 1978 Constitution, however, extended 'fundamental rights' to so called 'stateless' persons for a period of ten years; this was specifically relevant to the plantation workers and provided a time period to find an appropriate solution to the problem of 'statelessness.' There were several amendments to the 1978 Constitution in the subsequent years. The Sixteenth Amendment, which was passed in 1988, was of direct relevance to the plantation community, opening up the possibility of using minority languages as the languages of administration in certain districts (see Chapter 19).

CONCESSIONS TO PLANTATION WORKERS

In what was a progressive step, the Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Implementation) Amendment Act No. 47 was passed in 1981, reinstating the provisions of the 1967 Indo-Ceylon Act of 1967 which granted Ceylon and Indian citizenship in the ratio 4:7, irrespective of the physical repatriation of the latter category. The CWC president S. Thondaman had requested J. R. Jayewardene to make this change shortly after the elections of 1977.⁵ The 1981 agreement also speeded up the citizenship procedure, as people no longer had to wait for the physical repatriation of families to India in order to acquire citizenship in Sri Lanka.

Another important law that gave power to the plantation workers was the repeal of the Local Bodies Election Ordinance in 1978, which had prevented plantation workers from participating in local body polls, even if they could vote in parliamentary elections. As a consequence of this repeal, CWC nominees were elected to urban councils in Hatton-Dickoya and Talawakelle. Furthermore, plantation candidates were nominated in the District Development Councils—government appointed bodies—in Colombo, Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, Ratnapura and Badulla. There was an understanding given by the President Jayewardene—and this was implemented in practice—that in light of their minority status, the nominees from the plantation sector would

⁵ P. P. Devaraj, personal interview, 2 March 2005. Devaraj accompanied S. Thondaman to the residence of President J. R. Jayewardene when this request and response were made.

also service as vice presidents in the councils (P. P. Devaraj, personal interview, 22 October 2010). The net effect was increased involvement of plantation workers in the politics of the country and greater representation in key local institutions.

THE 1980 STRIKE

Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that the CWC did not participate in the all-island strike in 1980, called by unions in the public sector corporations, who, having to manage on a fixed salary, had been badly hit by increasing inflation and difficulties obtaining adequate food and lodging. The Essential Services Act of 1979 had removed the rights of these workers to strike. However, as economic pressures increased, various trade unions formed a Joint Trade Union Action Committee (JTUAC) in March 1980, which subsequently launched a series of strikes to protest the situation and to demand higher wages.

The CWC did not support the strike, viewing it as a political rather than an industrial action, and one that was badly planned by the organisers, the Joint Trade Union Action Committee,⁶ consisting of, among others, leading trade union federations and white collar worker unions. Additionally, there were other problems. The Ceylon Mercantile Union, led by Bala Tampoe, had disagreed with the idea of a strike, saying it was uncoordinated and that the response in many quarters was poor. But the main criticism of the CWC towards the organisers was that the trade unions supporting the strike had not supported or sympathised with the CWC during the period from 1970 to 77 when the estate workers had been hard hit by the nationalisation reforms. 'Unity between the trade unions could not therefore be established',⁷ according to the CWC. The general strike was crushed by the government and the participants summarily dismissed from their employment, a huge blow to the non-estate workers' movement.

⁶ Members of the Joint Trade Union Action Committee included the Ceylon Trade Union Federation; Sri Lanka Independent Trade Union Federation; Public Services Trade Union Federation; Government Workers Trade Union Federation; Government Clerical Services Union; Samastha Lanka Rajya Lipikaru Sangamaya; Local Government Trade Union Federation; Sri Lanka Jathika Guru Sangamaya; Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions and Sri Lanka Independent Government Trade Union Federation.

⁷ *The General Strike of 1980 and the Position of the Ceylon Workers Congress*, Ceylon Labour Foundation files, Colombo, mimeo, undated.

As a result, the CWC was disaffiliated from the International Union of Food and Allied Workers Associations in 1981. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) took a more lenient position reporting to its executive board in 1981 that the activities of S. Thondaman had been in background of the 'very peculiar circumstances of Sri Lanka', whereas by becoming a minister, he had the 'unique opportunity to serve not only the country but to rehabilitate the plantation Tamils from years of neglect and years of discrimination.' According to the ICFTU, this explained why Thondaman remained in government, 'in spite of the admittedly anti-trade Union measures' that the government was guilty of (Ceylon Workers Congress 1982).

1981 ANTI-TAMIL VIOLENCE

In 1981, the plantation workers were again subjected to communal violence at a time when S. Thondaman was Minister of Rural Industrial Development. Again, this violence was condemned by the CWC and other trade unions. On 29 August 1981, the CWC expressed shock at 'the fresh wave of violence' which opened the barely healed wounds of August 1977 'more painfully and with increased venom, terror and horror.' As a result of these attacks, plantation workers had been 'forced to flee their line rooms' and been made 'targets of hoodlums and thugs', who had a 'field day, looting, murdering, maiming and raping these defenceless people.' It observed that the attack on the plantation workers seemed to have 'followed a pattern', and that as before, 'the machinery established to provide safety and security to members of the public' remained 'passive and mute while rowdies went on the rampage and ruled the roost against members of one community.' (CWC statement 1981).

Pointed criticism was recorded on the conduct of estate management for failing to prevent the marauders from looting the homes of the plantation workers. The CWC linked this to the fact that the workers were still, by and large, 'stateless' and were therefore subject to all forms of discrimination. What is more, workers were often forced to deal with these problems themselves:

It is common, but depressing knowledge that managements of estates had not taken any action to prevent marauding mobs entering their estates and causing such ravages. It is also a matter of regret that some estate managements had covertly encouraged thugs to terrorise their workers to

wreak vengeance. This attitude of managements only gives added weight to our demand that the 'captive labour' situation in which the plantation worker has remained since the advent of the industry should be ended forthwith (CWC statement 1981).

Furthermore, the same statement criticised the management for its

lack of managerial understanding and responsibilities, in regard to their workers. In such a situation it becomes all the more imperative that the workers be freed from the captive labour situation so that they could independently develop themselves to meet the challenges that face them.

In contrast to the 1977 attacks on plantation workers, the CWC did not accuse the government of being directly culpable but called on it to investigate these incidents as alleged culprits were being released. As in 1977, this violence led to an increased rate of repatriation to India and a movement of affected refugees to the Trincomalee district in the North and the East (Devaraj 2010: 107). Nevertheless, the scale of the violence can be gauged both from personal accounts and from studies done on the events, which show that thousands of estate Tamils were rendered destitute in the process. A special committee headed by I. M. Ismail was set up to inquire into the 1981 violence, just before the 1982 presidential elections, which returned President Jayewardene to power—again with the support of the plantation vote.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND REFERENDUM OF 1982

J. R. Jayewardene was conscious of the significance of the plantation vote as well as the promise he had made to S. Thondaman to resolve this issue at an early date. In 1982, during a visit to India, he took up these concerns in New Delhi where he expressed the view that the problem of statelessness was Sri Lanka's and would be taken care of by his government (P. P. Devaraj, personal communication, 21 March 2012). Sirimavo Bandaranaike criticised this position as a 'betrayal', maintaining that according to the agreements she had signed earlier, the stateless were the responsibility of India government (Devaraj, personal communication, 21 March 2012). In many ways, the position assumed by the government marked a 'process of policy change by Sri Lanka on the statelessness issue.'

On 20 October 1982, the country held its first presidential election, one year earlier than was required by the Constitution.⁸ The election was won by J. R. Jayewardene with 189,738 votes or 52.91 per cent of the total valid votes. The shift towards the UNP was highest in the Nuwara Eliya district, with an increase of 20.14 per cent, where 47.5 per cent of the population in 1981 were estate Tamils.⁹ In Nuwara Eliya J. R. Jayewardene won 109,000 or 63.10 per cent of the votes.¹⁰

On 22 December 1982, a referendum was held to approve the Bill entitled 'the fourth Amendment to the Constitution' providing that 'unless sooner dissolved the First Parliament shall continue until August 1989 and no longer and shall thereupon stand dissolved.' In essence this referendum was to extend the term of President J. R. Jayewardene until 1989. Most of the political parties and leading civil rights organisations opposed the extension. However, the votes from the plantation areas were crucial. In the referendum Jayewardene received some 55 per cent of the valid votes (3,141,223 votes in favour out of a total of 5,747,206 valid votes).¹¹ The referendum was successful in consolidating the position of the UNP party for most of the decade.

SIPHONING THE SURPLUS

The new government also embarked immediately on what has been referred to as the 'open economy' policy, undertaking liberalisation policies in line with the free market model of development. It removed import restrictions, devalued the currency, gave tax holidays and concessions to foreign investment and embarked on its major schemes, such as the Free Trade Zone, acceleration of the Mahaweli Project, and the Greater Colombo Development Scheme, which were seen as the main levers to this growth process. Samarasinghe has argued that the presidential elections also gave the UNP the opportunity to pursue more aggressively its 'open economy' model of development, a process that had proved more

⁸ Six candidates stood as candidates for the post: J. R. Jayewardene (UNP), Hector Kobbekaduwa (SLFP), Rohana Wijeweera (JVP), G. G. Ponnambalam (Akila Illankai Tamil Congress), Colvin R. De Silva (LSSP) and Vasudeva Nanayakkara (Nava Sama Samaja Party).

⁹ 'National Elections,' *Economic Review*, December 1982, pp. 6–8.

¹⁰ Anon., 'Presidential Election: 20.10.1982.' Available at <http://www.slections.gov.lk/pdf/1982%20Presidential.pdf> (accessed 14 November 2014).

¹¹ Parliament of Sri Lanka, 'Referendums.' Available at <http://www.parliament.lk/referendums> (accessed 14 November 2014).

difficult in the initial period as the staple exports of the country did not fare well and there was major problems affecting domestic agriculture, particularly paddy cultivation (1983: 158). Under these circumstances plantation production, in its historical role as the main source of foreign exchange, assumed even more strategic significance. Surpluses were siphoned off from this sector to finance the liberalisation programme.

At the same time, the government did little to alleviate the social and welfare facilities that had historically characterised the plantation areas. Some minimal measures were undertaken, largely with the support of foreign development aid, to provide crèche facilities, family planning services, medical facilities and better education (Kurian 1982: 100–13). But the scale of the problem on the plantations was immense particularly after so many years of neglect. On the whole, social and welfare facilities of the workers continued to be deplorable in spite of the profits that were generated by the estates themselves.

In addition, the workers began to experience increased vulnerability with regard to unemployment. The 1977 election manifesto of the UNP had stated that it would give 'utmost priority' to resolving the problem of unemployment and underemployment. One of the first steps towards dealing with this problem was the policy of increasing employment on the estates. By a ruling given to the state plantation corporations, the labour ratio on tea was raised from 1 to 1.25, rubber from 0.45 to 0.75 and coconut from 0.1 to 0.3 per acre. This was intended to ameliorate the unemployment in the surrounding villages by increasing the employment of Sinhalese. More of the latter were employed resulting in underemployment overall. Another element that was a direct consequence of government policy was the recruitment of Sinhalese crèche attendants for the estates. Many of them were political appointees, did not speak Tamil and were unconcerned about the problems on the plantations. This policy led to considerable resentment amongst the estate workers (Kurian 1982: 102).

Government policies had also resulted in unemployment among the plantation workers. The estates that had been handed over to the National Agricultural Diversification and Settlement Authority (NADSA) for diversification schemes subsequently faced problems. When this project came to an end in 1981, these lands were given to the neighbouring villagers, 'overlooking the claims of many workers who have slaved on the plantations for generations' (Virakesari, 25 November 1981). Although this was subsequently stopped, many of the workers were forced to leave the land and became unemployed. Around 20,000 workers were put in this vulnerable position.

The estates handed over for the Mahaweli Project had the same effect on the plantation workers. The land was given to those who had been displaced by the scheme, but in consequence, the workers on the estates faced unemployment. Many of the trade unions protested against these measures and statements condemning this policy were made by S. Nadesan of the United Plantation Workers (*Virakesari*, 31 October 1981), Aziz President of the DWC (*Virakesari*, 20 October 1981), Ramiah, General Secretary Ceylon Plantation Workers Union (*Sun*, 13 November 1981) and Sellasamy, General Secretary of the CWC (*Virakesari*, 2 April 1981). Thus, in spite of the financial contribution of the plantation sector to the economy and the pattern of development, the workers gained little and continued to remain vulnerable and live under extremely difficult conditions. As in the case of the previous regimes, the plantation order and hierarchy on the estates was maintained in ways that were reminiscent of older times, and the tight labour controls that characterised it were left untouched.

INCREASING MILITANCY AND THE 1983 ANTI-TAMIL POGROM

In July and August 1983, a third period of anti-Tamil violence flared up during the tenure of J. R. Jayewardene. Thondaman in his capacity as president of the CWC declared that the state apparatus no longer seemed to protect victims from a 'savage form of violence' and that it was 'more than unfortunate that these elements of disaster, these squads of goondas and rabble have been allowed to parade the streets freely, causing havoc and inflicting misery of such proportions with impunity.'¹² Some of the worst affected people were the estate workers who had moved to Vavuniya, Mannar and Trincomalee in the wake of the earlier anti-Tamil violence and had tried to settle there. The objective of the pogrom, according to the CWC leadership, was to condemn the workers to a 'permanent state of captive labour.'¹³ The huts of the Trincomalee settlers were burnt even before the riots began in Colombo. Furthermore, they were 'uprooted from their homes in the early hours ... bundled and brought against their will to Nuwara Eliya and Hatton and left as destitutes.'¹⁴

¹² Ceylon Workers Congress, Statement by CWC National at emergency meeting 14 Aug. 1983 held under the chairmanship of the President, S. Thondaman, Colombo, 1983.

¹³ Ceylon Workers Congress, Statement by CWC National, 1983.

¹⁴ Ceylon Workers Congress, Statement by CWC National, 1983.

The increasing violence against Tamils in the plantation sector forced the CWC leadership to take a more critical position about participation in the government. In an emergency session in August 1983, the CWC National Committee condemned the treatment meted out to the Tamil workers and censured the police and other authorities for their role in colluding with and worsening the situation:

Instead of implementing the declared policy of regularizing the settlements of persons of Indian origin in these areas, where they were transported and dumped as refugees after the previous holocausts, a concerted attempt has been made by the officials to drive them out of their holdings under various false pretexts. This had further intensified around the middle of July when the Police and security personnel set in motion a wave of terror intimidating the settlers and driving them away.¹⁵

Alleging that violence against the minority had been a permanent feature of Sri Lanka politics for three decades, the CWC stated that violence had

... erupted once again on a large scale with unprecedented savagery. Organised groups went on the rampage, unchecked for nearly a week, destroying and looting property, setting houses and establishments on fire, and killing and maiming the innocent and defenceless victims while the guardians of the law remained inactive and in some instances even encouraged and assisted the lawless. It is this attitude of the law-enforcing agencies that has shaken the confidence of the people and eroded their faith in the government.¹⁶

In the discussions held between a delegation of the Ceylon Workers Congress leadership and President J. R. Jayewardene, the CWC pointed out that the uprising was neither accidental nor natural but was the execution of a well planned scheme by an organised group. Thondaman pointed out that the Superintendent of Police had earlier terrorised persons of Indian origin who had gone as settlers to Vavuniya, and claimed that such violence was part of a move designed to block all avenues of progress for plantation workers and to keep them as captive labour. The delegation pointed out that a large number of estate workers had been affected by the violence and that even in places where actual attacks had not taken place, there was a great sense of insecurity. A suggestion

¹⁵ Ceylon Workers Congress, Statement by CWC National, 1983.

¹⁶ Ceylon Workers Congress, Statement by CWC National, 1983.

was made to give plantation youth training in the national militia and to make suitable institutional arrangements for a security system in the plantation areas.

CHALLENGING VIOLENCE

The period between 1977 and 1983 could be viewed as the culmination of economic, ethnic and political tensions in the estate sector. There were two important responses by the plantation workers to the hardships on the estate and the increasing ethnic violence that threatened their existence. The first was increased militancy and a tendency to retaliate against the onslaught. This was significant, because in the post-Independence period, the struggles had tended, on the whole, to be limited to strike action and hartals. Recourse to the carrying of weapons and preparation for armed retaliation was also a major change and physical combat was considered a real option. The trade unions played an important part in this respect. Vigilante committees were set up to watch out for intruders, persons were trained to counter the attacks with light weapons and provision was made to care for workers injured in such encounters.¹⁷

Of further significance was the fact that the workers and their organisations undertook these initiatives without government support. In fact, a remarkable result of these actions was that, while the 1983 pogrom was by far the bloodiest attack on the Tamils in the south of the island, the plantation workers were able to protect themselves more effectively in 1983 than in the previous years. At the same time, there was frequent debate among the workers on the politics of the ethnic conflict and their role in this context. Debates also took place on the role of S. Thondaman in the cabinet, with criticism being expressed on the lack of protection offered to plantation workers from the state machinery. Many workers therefore assumed a more radical stance to the government. Circumstances had forced them to display more militant opposition to ethnic violence and the tactics used for their survival became more successful. It was certainly a turning point in the plantation workers' history.

In these different ways, the workers and the labour movement on the plantations became more directly involved in national politics while continuing to experience serious economic and social discrimination within the context of Sinhala-Tamil tensions. Becoming the target of

¹⁷ The subsection is based on field interviews in the 1980s by Rachel Kurian.

heightened anti-Tamil violence in a conflict that was not of its own choice or making was, in many ways, the last straw for the plantation community. Many of the workers and their families recognised that they could not rely on the state or even their own political leadership for protection but had to organise, and even arm themselves to counter anti-Tamil attacks. These tactics were successful in limiting the damage on the estates during in the most violent anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983, unlike the experiences of 1977 and 1981. But the very process of mobilisation at the grassroots levels gave rise to increased militancy and demonstrated both the power of the workers' numerical strength and tactical abilities. Such developments were strategic in the plantation community, and some of the leadership came to accept and adopt direct confrontation as a means of claiming their rights as workers and citizens in the country.

The increasing economic and ethnic tensions of the previous decades culminated, as noted in Chapter 18, in greater mobilisation and militancy on the part of the plantation workers. This chapter focuses on two major actions that proved decisive in breaking some of the main constraints of their past. The first was the historic strike of plantation unions in 1984 and the second was the prayer campaign led by S. Thondaman in 1986. The strike—a truly exceptional event—was sustained through the joint action of some fifteen unions representing the vast majority of plantation workers protesting against economic discrimination and low wages. It was militant action undertaken by the largest section of the working class in the country, even at a time when the leader of the CWC trade union held a cabinet position. The strike was successful and resulted in major improvements in plantation workers' wages. It was also notable since it was largely peaceful. The prayer campaign of 1986 was similarly a unique occurrence. Using a religious point of departure as the basis of what was essentially a nonviolent method of protest, Minister Thondaman intervened with this action at a critical juncture when the country was economically and politically vulnerable and ethnic tensions and war were escalating. The result was significant, with the resolution of the statelessness problems that had affected the plantation workers for nearly four decades.

JOINT ACTION AGAINST ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION

The 1970s had been a time of widespread suffering for the plantation workers, characterised by hunger, unemployment and political insecurity.

Many workers had viewed the entry of the president of the CWC into the cabinet in 1978 as an opportunity to remedy some of these injustices. But the slow pace of change, inadequate progress on essential demands, and more immediately, the discrimination with regard to wages and benefits led to growing resentment on the part of the workers. The leadership of the trade unions on the estates was aware of these frustrations, as well as of the need to take measures that could ameliorate the problems and contain the unrest. In his autobiography, S. Thondaman noted his dilemma under these circumstances:

I had been invited to join the Cabinet in 1978 and I did for the simple reason that I thought it would be one way of securing the rights of the Tamil community of recent Indian origin which still suffered many disabilities. But even as a Cabinet Minister I was not able to resolve the basic problems of the artificially depressed wages of plantation workers for nearly six years (Thondaman 1987: 168).

He was also frustrated by the lack of consideration shown to the plantation workers even when there was sufficient surplus generated in the sector:

In spite of the very high prices being fetched by tea from 1981/82, and in spite of the record profits being made by industry (most of which was siphoned into the Treasury), neither the employers nor the government showed any inclination to grant the plantation workers a living or even a fair wage (Thondaman 1987: 169).

Even the decision of the Wages Board in 1982 to award an increase in wages in the form of allowances was not implemented. According to Thondaman, the 'usual excuse' that it was too expensive for the country at the moment was 'trotted out to deny the workers their legitimate dues' (1988: 170). As a result there was growing resentment among the workers and their unions at the government's denial of their wage rights. It was an issue on which several unions came together and 'even hinted that they might be compelled to resort to trade-union action in support of their demands' (Thondaman 1988). Commenting on the lack of response by the government, Thondaman noted

Perhaps it was that in the backdrop of the traumatic experiences after the July 1983 communal disturbances, the ongoing armed militant movement in the North and East and the memory of the disastrous strike of July 1980, the trade unions would not embark on any strike action (1988).

By the end of 1983, in the aftermath of the July anti-Tamil violence in the country, the plantation unions became more resolved to join forces against government policies. A resolution passed by fifteen trade unions (the fourteen unions under the Joint Plantation Trade Union Committee plus the CWC) in November 1983 deplored the failure of the government to increase wages as required for the plantation workers and protested against the imposition of the rehabilitation tax of 1 per cent that had been levied on all wage earners, which it stated was 'especially ludicrous' as the plantation workers had been the victims of violence. It also condemned the use of emergency power 'to evict plantation workers' settled in the northern and eastern provinces, noting that security had become increasingly a 'paramount question' for the workers. It also demanded a guaranteed monthly wage and equal pay for men and women in the plantation sector.

EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN AND MEN

A struggle for equal wages for women and men on the plantations involved political mobilisation both within and outside the plantations. The issue of gender discrimination had been raised earlier by women's groups in the country and had gained momentum during the struggles associated with the UN 'Decade of Women' (1975–85). During this period, many national organisations and political groups in Sri Lanka condemned the patriarchal practices and injustices experienced by women and made pronouncements on women's liberation. The local feminist lobby also took the lead and a few trade unions joined in the campaign for equal pay.

In the 1980s, women's associations all over the country expressed their concern on the rights of plantation workers. The 'Voice of Women', an organisation started in 1980, and based in Colombo, highlighted the exploitation of plantation women workers in its first magazine (published in Sinhala, Tamil and English) and raised issues of their unequal pay, long hours of work, and subjection to male domination. It called not only for equal pay, but also for more women as trade union officials, improved health facilities, better education and improved crèches for working women. The journal exposed some 'pernicious practices' on estates such as payment of wages, maternity and provident fund benefits to the husband of the female worker instead of to the worker herself, and malpractices in the weighing of tea leaves (*Voice of Women*, January 1980: 6–7). Another organisation, the Women's Education Centre, formed in 1983, which later became the Women's Education and Research Centre, published a

pamphlet 'The Exploitation of Women on Plantations'. In what could be viewed as the most significant strike on the plantations in the post-Independence period, equal pay was included in the demands and was taken up by all plantation unions on strike and was gained in 1984 after a century and half of discrimination. It also marked the coming together of external women's organisations with the trade unions in a common democratic demand affecting women plantation workers.

THE STRIKE OF APRIL 1984

It was the government plantation union, the United National Party (UNP) union, the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers' Union (LJEWU), led by Gamini Dissanayake, which formally indicated in March 1984 that its members could resort to strike action if they were not given the wage increases provided for employees in the 1982 budget.¹ This demand was immediately supported by more trade unions on the plantations keen to respond to the needs of their members. On 23 March 1984, the Joint Plantation Trade Union Committee (JPTUC) announced that they were in agreement with the demands and that their unions would strike from 2 April. The call for strike action was also welcomed by the Democratic Workers' Congress, which for many years had considered itself to be the only serious rival to the CWC in the plantation areas. This meant that some fifteen trade unions had agreed to go on strike on 2 April 1984 if their demands were not met (*Sun*, 23 March 1984). The LJEWU also put forward the demand for the equalisation of wages for men and women.

While endorsing the demands for equal pay between women and men, the JPTUC, however, went further in its demands than the LJEWU. It urged the government to provide the plantation workers the wage increases as given to public sector employers in the 1981 and 1982 budgets as well as an allowance of Rs 2 a month for every point of increase in the cost of living index. It also wanted a guaranteed monthly

¹ The demands included a wage increase of Rs 100, which had been provided for public sector employees in the 1982 budget but had not been given to the estate workers, and an equalisation of wages for men and women. This notice, issued by the UNP plantation trade union, was viewed with some scepticism by other unions and gave rise to the speculation that this was merely a transient threat, which the LJEWU would soon withdraw. It was also seen as a way of taking the leadership of the plantation workers out of the hands of Thondaman, the CWC president, thereby making inroads into the fairly well entrenched support of the CWC in the up-country areas.

wage for all plantation workers. The JPTUC had earlier previously undertaken two token strikes (18 August 1981 and 11 May 1982) where these demands had been raised (Nadesan 1986). It also asked for the withdrawal of the rehabilitation levy, amounting to 1 per cent of the emoluments of all employers per months, that had been placed on employees from January 1984.

In what could be considered a way of finessing the broader platform of trade unions on the plantations, the government held bilateral discussions with the leaders of the government union, the LJEWU, and reached an agreement for a marginal increase in the hourly wages for men and women in the tea, rubber and coconut sectors. It also agreed to institute equal wages for both women and men. For the tea plantation workers, the wage increase proposed meant an increase from Rs 18 and Rs 15 for men and women respectively to Rs 20.50 for both, reflecting a marginal increase of some 14 per cent increase for men, and somewhat more substantial 37 per cent increase for women. Given the level of deprivation in the sector, these increases were not significant. At the same time, what looked like a major social reform granting equal pay for women and men (which was not the main demand)—was used by the government in order to avoid giving a general significant wage increase for plantation workers. These bilateral agreements were essentially a tactic to sideline the other unions. The government was keen furthermore to maintain stability on the plantations. According to the LJEWU, these concessions and the possibility of increased wages through further negotiations, meant that there was no need to go ahead with the strike on the 1 April. Replying to the query as to why the LJEWU had accepted this situation while other trade unions had not, Raja Seneviratne, general secretary of the LJEWU, remarked that they did not want to 'kill the goose for the golden eggs' (*Sun*, 24 March 1984).

Countering these tactics, and angered by the bilateral nature of these negotiations and the inadequate benefits derived, the CWC and the other trade unions under the JPTUC decided to go ahead with their strike. They also appealed to the wider working class to support their struggle and join in the strike. A joint statement by four prominent trade unions in the plantation sector, issued after the meeting held under the chairmanship of Colvin R. de Silva, president of the LSSP union, the Lanka Estates Workers Union (LEWU), on 23 March 1984, highlighted the need for all workers to come together and advance the cause of the plantation workers:

The joint statement has called upon all workers in both the public and private sectors, whether they reside on the estates or come from the

villages, to join in the strike. We call upon the rest of the working class of this country to rally to the support of the action of the plantation workers. The provocations which the plantation workers have endured have now become totally unendurable. There has never been a more just case for workers to strike (*Sun*, 28 March 1984).

On 2 April, the CWC and fourteen unions supporting the demands of the plantation workers went on strike. In what could be seen as an increasing alliance of plantation workers across the sector, some members of the government union, the LJEWU, also joined the strike in explicit defiance of their unions' directives, indicating that the union had accepted the government's terms (*Sun*, 3 April 1984). The leadership of the LJEWU however, voiced its disquiet at the consequences of the strike for the economy and appealed to the workers to return to work. Its president, Gamani Dissanayake, criticised the strike, claiming that it was 'easy' to ask workers to strike but more difficult to 'ask them to work', and questioned the directives of the other unions:

We feel ... that the present call to strike by some Unions in the plantation sector is mistimed and will ultimately damage the cause of the plantation workers. We, therefore, ask any of our members who were cajoled, or coerced or misled to join the strike to immediately return to work. We also call upon other unions and their membership to return to work as we must do nothing to damage or harm our economy (*Sun*, 4 April 1984).

In spite of all government efforts, large numbers of workers joined the strike, which was concentrated in Talawakelle, Kandy, Uda Pussellawa, and Haputale regions. The general secretary of the CWC, M. S. Sellasamy indicated that 'they would not abandon their strike until their demands were acceded to by the government' (*Sun*, 4 April 1984). There was 100 per cent participation in Hatton and almost all workers came out in Nuwara Eliya. There was also widespread sympathy in the rest of the country for the plight of the plantation workers. The *Island* editorial under the banner 'No April Fool's Joke' emphasised the repressive conditions on the estates:

Historically plantation labour has been the most deprived and exploited sector of the Sri Lankan proletariat. They have no guarantee of fixed employment throughout the month and their salaries are pathetically paltry when one takes account of the nature of the work they are engaged in and their contribution to the national economy (*Island*, 3 April 1984).

The strike had cut across political barriers and a front had been formed between the CWC and the JPTUC (controlling about 600,000 workers in total) with increased tensions and costs of the strike in a vital sector of the economy. The striking unions were in particular angry about the bilateral negotiations that took place between the government and the LJEWU, and decided continue the strike.

The strike hit hard at the economy. By the second day, it had spread further in the plantation sector. President J. R. Jayewardene informed members of parliament that, if the government were to agree to the demands of the striking plantation sector trade unions, it would cost the country another 2,000 million rupees, which he viewed as 'disastrous in the present economic situation.' He urged the workers to return to work, indicating that the work stoppage was costing the country around Rs 60 million a day (*Sun*, 4 April 1984). But the striking unions were firm in their demands and the government was finally forced to negotiate with them.

While the cabinet attempted to hold meetings with the management and only the main unions, CWC president Thondaman insisted on inviting representatives from the wider alliance, Joint Committee of Plantation Trade Unions (JCPTU) to participate in discussions (Devaraj, personal communication, 21 March 2012). In spite of the government agreeing to set up a new committee to look into the matter of wage hikes for the estate sector and providing increased festival allowances, the CWC and the unions under the JPTUC continued their agitation, insisting that their demands be fully met. On 7 April, the government decided to suspend further discussions with the estate trade unions until the workers returned to their jobs. In his autobiography, however, Thondaman noted that it was at this point that negotiations and discussions began 'in real earnest', even while the strike continued (1987: 195). By 9 April, a final agreement was reached, resulting in the wages of male and female workers becoming equal and increased to Rs 23.75 a day in tea plantations; for women workers, this represented an increase of nearly 70 per cent from their prevailing wage of Rs 15. Furthermore, the whole question of wages to plantation workers was to be examined by a committee appointed by the president, which was to include representatives of the CWC, LJEWU, and other plantation unions. Also endorsed was a six-day week work and a monthly wage for workers. The strike was officially called off on 10 April 1984.

Overall, the nine-day strike wrested for the workers substantial wage increases and the gain of equal wages for men and women. The timing of the strike—the flush was exceptionally good and prices of tea were high in the world market—was strategic as the government could not

afford the loss to the exchequer given its commitment to the 'open economy' model of development and its increasing defence expenditure resulting from ethnic conflict. Significantly, the strike was called off not in response to the appeals made by the government leaders but only after the CWC and the JPTUC had been satisfied. The CWC was also in a somewhat sensitive position as its leader, S. Thondaman, was a member of the cabinet. The CWC took care to emphasise that the strike was for labour rights and not to be misconstrued as an anti-government protest. G. Sellasamy announced that the strike was against the decision to raise salaries without trade union consultation and that it was an 'economic struggle' and not 'anti-government' action (*Ceylon Daily News*, 4 April 1984).

The April 1984 strike has been viewed as a 'watershed in industrial relations' (Thondaman 1987: 169). It was significant on several scores. It was the first time in the post-Independence period that most major plantation trade unions (except for the government union, the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union or LJEWU) came together on a common economic issue and participated as a common front. What is more, the massive scale of protest was both undertaken and organised solely by the plantation sector. Hitherto, strikes of fairly long duration had nearly always relied on the support (and leadership) of urban-based trade unions. The success of the strike in terms of benefits gained by the plantation workers was even more significant in light of the declared policy of the state that they would on no account give into the demands. In addition, one of the leaders of the strike, S. Thondaman, was a minister, who used his position in the negotiation process while at the same time remaining an opponent of the government as the president of the largest trade union on the estates. The strike also demonstrated the vulnerability of the state to the collective action of the plantation workers and the potential influence of the largest organised workforce in a crucial sector of the economy.

SPREAD OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION

The strike stimulated greater awareness amongst workers of their collective strength and the strategic value of industrial strike action to get better pay and work conditions. Shortly after the April 1984 strike, the clerical and other staff grades represented by the Ceylon Estates Staff Union protested that their membership had been overlooked in respect of a living wage increase since 1979, while superintendents and workers had received wage increases. By mid-June 1984, labour unrest had spread among

workers and staff of many privately owned estates and smallholdings particularly in Kalutara, Ingiriya and Matugama (*Sun*, 15 June 1984). By the middle of July 1984, a new wage structure for plantation workers—Rs 24 per day in the tea industry and Rs 22.50 to Rs 23 per day in the rubber industry—was recommended by the trade union members of the Estate Wages Committee. However, the management did not comply. A walkout was staged under the leadership of Thondaman of the CWC and Colvin R. de Silva of the LEWU, indicating that the workers could take to stronger action to fight for their rights. Addressing a meeting at Opatha, Thondaman announced

We should not be complacent of the recent wage hike, but be prepared for a major struggle to get reasonable wage increase to keep pace with the rising cost of living. The plantation workers will not cow down to thuggery, intimidation and threats of violence (*Island*, 4 August 1984).

The government was clearly concerned by the possibility of further industrial action and by 8 August, a presidential directive had been issued to the JEDB and the SLSPC to pay the workers Rs 23.78 per day until the Estate Wages Committee settled the issue.

POLITICAL GAINS ON CITIZENSHIP

The economic gains made by the plantation workers after the 1984 April strike were also important in spurring them on to struggle for their political rights and citizenship. Statelessness and disenfranchisement had haunted their lives and dominated political negotiations since shortly after Independence. All the trade unions had raised these issues with different governments, asking for a speedy end to statelessness. S. Thondaman had taken up the issue with President Jayewardene, who assured him that he would find an early settlement. In 1980, nine opposition unions sent a memorandum to the President noting that the prevailing situation was a 'flagrant violation' of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and those wishing to acquire Sri Lankan citizenship should be granted it immediately. The spread of militancy in the 1980s gave a new momentum to plantation workers' political struggles, as they developed new tactics and mobilised to counter the increasing numbers of attacks made on them during the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflicts of the 1970s and early 1980s. The lack of protection afforded by the government to the Tamils also brought India more directly into the ethnic conflict in Sri

Lanka. Finally, the success of the April strike also gave the workers and their leaders both confidence and conviction that it was an opportune moment, under these circumstances, to end statelessness.

The statelessness of the plantation workers had also become a concern for both the Sinhala religious groups as well as the Tamil militant groups in the north and east of the country. The Sinhala Maha Sangha (the Supreme Council of the leading Buddhist monks in the country) was in favour of granting citizenship to the 'stateless', worried that the presence of stateless workers of 'Indian origin' could be used as a ploy for such an intervention by India (Sabaratnam 1990: 149). At the same time, some of the Tamil groups, such as the EPRLF and EROS, had also been active in recruiting members from the plantation region. A sixth amendment to the constitution was introduced in 1984, which was specifically aimed against supporting, espousing or advocating for separate state within Sri Lanka. While the government had assured Thondaman that it would solve the problem of statelessness, it delayed the process, concerned about the response of the Sinhalese majority.

The escalation of the ethnic conflict in the north and east as well as the delays and the lack of progress in the 'statelessness' problem in the 1980s led among many in the plantation community to believe in 'the need to develop the same kind of vigorous approach to resolve the problems of the plantation workers' (Devaraj, personal communication, 21 March 2012). There was also little doubt that the success of the 1984 strike had played a role in demanding a change in the style of leadership. It also helped the plantation community 'to recover from their trauma and gain a new confidence' (Devaraj, personal communication, 21 March 2012). Addressing the Youth Wing of the CWC on 27 November 1984, Thondaman reiterated that the union was 'dedicated to the path of non-violence' but that this did not mean that it was passive (Thondaman 1984). According to him it was necessary to educate the workers as well as to fight for better conditions and rights. At the same time, it was necessary 'not to fritter away' the gains made so far by undertaking 'adventuristic actions' which would 'create difficulties for those concerned to push us backwards'.

There was discussion within the CWC on what type of action could be taken to persuade the government to deal with the problem of statelessness. It was Thondaman who came up with the idea of undertaking a 'prayer campaign' which was essentially 'based on a Gandhian approach ... with the objective of bringing about a change of heart on the part of the decision makers' (P.P. Devaraj, personal communication, 21 March 2012). The CWC announced on 29 May 1985 that it would hold a

prayer campaign to focus on making the atmosphere more 'spiritual' and conducive to nonviolence. The prayer campaign was also a response to the increasingly restlessness in the plantation community, particularly among the youth, who were concerned about the delays in dealing with the problems of statelessness and other types of deprivation in the plantation sector.

The UNP government, however, continued to be cautious about the response of the Sinhala majority. In the light of this intransigence, a three month prayer campaign was initiated by the CWC to begin on 12 January 1986, which was *Thai Pongal* day, the harvest festival of the Tamils. The proposal was that workers would pray between 7 am and 12 noon and then return to work in the expectation the estate management would adjust their workloads so that they could work in the afternoons and thus be eligible for pay. The idea was that this was *not* to be viewed as a stoppage of work affecting production, or even as a strike, but rather a religious and strictly nonviolent intervention to seek spiritual guidance on how to deal with the problems of the plantation workers.

The campaign of January 1986 was specifically called to end the statelessness of the plantation workers and had the support of practically all the main trade unions on the plantations. The campaign had barely started before the Sri Lankan government accepted the demands of the trade unions and agreed to grant citizenship to those who wished to have it, without regard to the proportionality agreed upon earlier between the two countries. Commenting on the role of CWC leader in this achievement, the journalist D. B. S. Jeyaraj (1999) reflected that Thondaman showed 'brinkmanship' in undertaking the prayer campaign.

The timing of the campaign was crucial in removing nearly forty years of political deficit. It was a period when Tamil militant groups in the northern and eastern provinces had increased their demand for a separate Tamil nation. The financial costs of the ethnic conflict were also significant as escalating defence expenditures in a context of falling tourism might erode the economic programme of the government. Moreover, lending agencies suggested that they could stop aid unless the war ended (Pfaffenberger 1987: 155, 157). Diplomatic relations with India were also strained because of the influx of Tamil refugees into the country in the wake of the conflict.

The plantation workers had already clearly demonstrated their strength and unity in the 1984 strike, showing their ability to sustain industrial action by opposing the government and causing serious loss to the exchequer. Their prayer campaign, whose terms that workers were prepared to work in the afternoons to meet the demands of production,

meant that the participating workers and their unions could not be accused of subversive action. It also inhibited the use of police force to oppose the workers who were simply appealing to the gods for spiritual guidance.

As a result of the campaign, the government passed the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act of 1986. The Act acknowledged that the earlier agreements with regard to the figures of Indian and Sri Lankan registration had not worked out as planned, and that fewer persons than anticipated had applied for Indian citizenship.² As it was in the 'national interest' to no longer delay the problem of statelessness, the government agreed to grant Sri Lankan citizenship to the remaining persons. This meant that overall, Indian citizenship would be provided to those who applied (506,000 persons) while Sri Lankan citizenship would be granted to the remaining 469,000 persons and any other persons of Indian origin who were stateless but legally resident in the country.³ In principle, this meant that major steps had been taken to end the problem of statelessness.

Shortly afterwards, a Sixteenth Amendment of the 1978 Constitution was enacted by the parliament in 1988. According to the 1978 Constitution (articles 22 and 23), Sinhala was to be the language of administration, maintenance of public records and transaction of all business by public institutions in all provinces of Sri Lanka except for the northern and eastern provinces where these would be conducted in Tamil. This was an obvious injustice to the Tamils living the plantation districts where they were in the majority. The amended Article 22, paragraph 2 indicated that the president could, 'having regard to the proportion which the Sinhala and Tamil linguistic minority population in any unit comprising a division of an Assistant Government Agent, bears to the total population of that area, direct that both Sinhala and Tamil or a language other than the language used as the language of administration in the province in which such area may be situated, be used as the language of administration for such area.' In principle, the 1988 amendment of

² Just 506,000 out of the 600,000 persons to be provided Indian citizenship and repatriated to India had applied to the Indian High Commission.

³ Further Acts were passed in 1988, 2003 and 2009 to speed up the process and include persons who had been forced to leave the country because of the ethnic conflict. The Acts of 1988 and of 2003 had 'significant differences' in comparison to other laws. While the previous enactments required individuals to apply for citizenship, which was then conferred under the law by registration, these two Acts did not require persons to apply for it but 'Sri Lanka status was conferred on all eligible persons of Indian origin' who had not been given Sri Lanka citizenship under earlier Acts. In effect, they received citizenship effortlessly.

the Constitution opened up the possibility of having Tamil as one of the languages of public administration in the districts of the Central Province and other regions where the plantation community was concentrated. In reality however, this provision was seldom implemented (P. P. Devaraj, personal communication, 21 March 2012).

The 1984 strike and the 1986 prayer campaign were watersheds in plantation workers' struggles for their economic and political rights. Not only did they receive significantly higher wages, but the gender disparity in pay between women and men was also removed. Equal pay was of great importance, not only because plantations had been the bastions of male supremacy in every sphere, but also because women workers on estates were among the most exploited section of the working class. They received lower wages than men while working longer hours with little rest and leisure. The granting of equal pay was thus a step in the right direction to narrow both the democratic and gender deficits on plantations. The prayer campaign by the CWC was a unique event. It was a non-traditional and nonviolent but yet confrontational form of protest undertaken by trade unions, in the line with Gandhian notions of passive resistance. Thondaman's strategy was, in this sense, ingenious and hard to crush by traditional methods of coercion.

The decision to grant full citizenship stemmed from several considerations on the part of the government, including the urgent need to contain ethnic unrest in the country and sustain production on plantations. The government recognised the importance of appeasing a Tamil-speaking group in the centre of the Island, which did not want a separate state like the Tamils in the north and east, but rather demanded citizenship for its 'stateless' members. Furthermore, the plantations were an important source of revenue and foreign exchange for the government, which could be used to meet the increasing costs of the ethnic conflict in the country. By granting citizenship to the plantation workers, the government was able to bring about peace and quiet on the 'estate front' and continue receiving its contributions to the exchequer. Under these different pressures from the plantation sector, a major deficit in democracy was corrected, although the structures of the plantation system remained intact and social and gender injustice continued even up to the twenty-first century, as discussed in the subsequent section.

PART five

Democratic Struggles
and Social Justice in
the Twenty-first Century

PART

CH

THE

Ethnic Conflict, Coalition Politics and Deepening Democracy

They are animated by a commitment to achieving equality in political status within a reformed Sri Lankan state. This discourse of political equality is an articulation of a desire for full political integration, overcoming the persistent conditions of partial national integration, socio-political exclusion and marginality specific to the upcountry Tamil community.

Jayadeva Uyangoda, commenting on the political debate among social activists and the intelligentsia on the plantation community's 'collective political rights' (2011: 11–12).

By the late 1980s, the plantation workers, their unions and the community as a whole, had won the decades-long battle on major issues such recognition of unions, the trespass laws, citizenship and franchise. They had demonstrated their ability to mobilise effectively and undertake collective action to claim and obtain their labour and democratic rights and their keenness to make inroads into national politics and influence policy in favour of their electorate. The elimination of their political exclusion also meant that all political parties in the country were forced to recognise the strategic value of linking with and controlling the plantation vote, while the government was, in addition, aware of the need to contain labour unrest in a sector that was a major contributor to the exchequer. All these factors became even more significant by the last decades of the twentieth century as the ethnic tensions between the Sinhala majority and the minority Tamils in the north and east of the island escalated into violent conflict and civil war.

While the traditional leadership was challenged from within the labour movement, the spectrum of struggle for the rights of the plantation community was broadened through the active involvement of concerned

civil society organisations and actors. In many ways, there developed a process of 'deepening democracy', a process defined by Johan Gaventa as a political project concerned with 'developing and sustaining more substantive and empowered citizenship participation in the democratic process than is often found in representative democracy' (2006: 3).¹

POLITICAL AND ETHNIC VIOLENCE

Rogers, Spencer and Uyangoda have outlined two main areas of political violence in the country from 1986 onwards (1998: 774). The first was the populist Sinhala-nationalist JVP rebellion, which took place between 1987 and 1989 and involved killings of members of the armed forces, police, politicians and political activists. These events led to large numbers not voting in elections. By mid-1988, the government launched a counter-offensive, and held presidential elections on 19 December 1988—described by some as the most violent elections and with the lowest polling ever (see Samarasinghe 1989). The prime minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa of the United National Party (UNP) received 50.43 per cent of the valid votes² and was elected president.

Violence reached record proportions in 1988–89. According to a United Nations report of 1991, the government and the JVP leaders used the 'tactic of "exemplary killing" as a means of instilling terror in the civilian population.'³ Between late 1988 and November 1989 some 40,000 deaths and over 2,700 cases of disappearances were estimated, and leading JVP leaders, including Rohana Wijeweera, were caught and executed. The net effect was to install fear amongst ordinary people. As noted by Rogers, Spencer and Uyangoda, 'both sides shared one tactical objective: terrorizing the civilian population in order to undermine the public support available to the adversary' (1998: 775).

The second arena of violence was connected to the ethnic problem in the northeast of the country. One of the consequences of the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 had been that Tamil youth (some of whom went from other parts of the country to the north) and their organisations took

¹ Gaventa argued that deepening democracy could bring into deliberation the rights and duties of citizens and other identities including those associated with gender, ethnicity, and community (ibid.: 24–15).

² See <http://www.slelections.gov.lk> (accessed 17 November 2014).

³ The Report of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances undertaken between 7–18 October 1991.

militant action, demanding a separate state, 'almost instantly transforming a small insurgent movement into a formidable secessionist fighting force' (DeVotta 2002). By 1987, the most important of these groups was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which attacked key places and persons in the Sinhala heartland, often with deadly results. There was also an influx of refugees to the nearby state of Tamil Nadu in India with Tamil politicians of the state pressurising the Government of India to take action in response to the plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Negotiations were undertaken between the government and the LTTE but these failed and the UNP government 'responded with an overwhelming military campaign to crush the LTTE, becoming involved in 'an intractable civil war' (Rothenberg 1998: 524). A spate of political assassinations took place in the 1990s, beginning with the killing of Indian politician and former prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991 by a member of the LTTE. The late 1980s and the 1990s also witnessed continuing political killings in politics.⁴

NEGOTIATING FOR PARLIAMENTARY POWER

As a Tamil-speaking group living in the centre of the Island, the plantation workers had also been affected by the anti-Tamil legislation from the 1950s as well as by the growing hostility of the majority Sinhalese towards the Tamil community in the north and east of the country. But there remained significant gaps between the plantation community and the Tamils in the rest of the country, manifesting most obviously in terms of political priorities and social links. While some of the Tamil parties such as the Federal Party had been sympathetic to the plight of the plantation workers shortly after the country gained Independence, and had supported their rights in parliament, they had also not viewed the problems of the plantation community as part of their own demands for parity of treatments for the Tamils and Sinhalese in the country. The

⁴ In Sri Lanka, prominent politicians who were assassinated included Lalith Athulthmudali, the leader of the Democratic United National Front in 1993, President Premadasa (UNP) in 1993, Gamini Dissanayake, the UNP presidential candidate and the leader of the UNP LJEWU in 1994 and the TULF Tamil politician and human rights lawyer Neelan Tiruchelvam in 1999. In 2005, Lakshman Kadirgamar, Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2005 was assassinated. There were also several killings by the LTTE of ministers, including Tamil leaders of the TULF, PLOTE and EPRLF as well as prominent intellectuals who opposed its politics.

situation changed somewhat in the 1970s, when the Jaffna-based Federal Party (FP) and the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) came together to form the Tamil United Front (TUF) in 1972, and in 1976 established the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1976, constituting a broad-based yet relatively moderate group to address the concerns of all Tamils in the country.

In what could be viewed as a strategic move to incorporate the problems of the plantation community into political deliberations while demonstrating solidarity with the protests against discrimination against Tamils in the country, S. Thondaman, the leader of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, joined the TUF and even became a co-founder of the TULF. It was no doubt under his influence that the discrimination experienced by the plantation community through the Citizenship Acts in 1948 and 1949 was taken up in the TULF Manifesto in the subsequent elections in 1977. This manifesto noted that as a result of these Acts, 'the Tamil labourers of the tea and rubber plantations in the central hills of Ceylon whose blood and sweat alone have built up and sustained the prosperity of this country were rendered stateless' and while seven representatives had been elected to parliament in the 1947 elections, this number was brought down to zero in the subsequent elections in 1952 (TULF 1977). Linking the plight of the plantation workers with ethnic discrimination, it stated that this disenfranchisement was 'the first step that paved the way for a series of denial of the political rights of the minorities.'

Furthermore the extreme hardships suffered by the plantation workers and their families through the nationalisation of the plantations under the Land Reform laws in 1972 and 1975, including unemployment, food shortages and even starvation, forced the CWC union leadership to recognise the importance of forging a Tamil alliance. The other Tamil parties from the north and the east that formed part of the TULF also gained political and economic clout through their alliance with a large group of estate Tamil workers who lived in the Sinhalese hinterland.

But the moderate Tamil parties were overshadowed by more militant groups who increasingly took up the call for a separate state or Eelam for the Tamils in the country. Such violence was particularly ironic, as the CWC leadership had indicated that Eelam was not their demand, and they did not view it as a solution to the problems the plantation workers and their families experienced. But the aggression had taken its toll on the plantation community with more of its members, particularly the youth, sympathising and supporting what they viewed as the liberation struggle for the Tamil people. These political changes, while still on a relatively small scale, nevertheless, were viewed with alarm by both the

state as well as the established political leadership on the plantations, as they had the potential of creating militant confrontations where the majority Sinhalese resided.

Deftly and carefully avoiding involvement in LTTE politics, the CWC leadership concentrated its negotiations on the problems affecting the plantation community. In many ways, this policy was a continuation of its stand from the 1960s where it had aligned with one or other party in return for some form of political representation. The power of the plantation unions and parties was manifested in many ways in the subsequent period. The influence of the plantation vote in the 1988 presidential elections was also significant; in the district of Nuwara Eliya, which was the heartland of the plantations. President Premadasa received 62 per cent of the valid votes with a voter turnout of nearly 80 per cent, the highest level of participation in any district in the country.⁵ The votes of plantation workers were also influential in regional and local elections. As a part of the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka accord, the government had amended the Constitution and passed Acts providing for the creation and functioning of the Provincial Councils and instituting a system of proportional representation. The CWC supported the UNP during the different elections and even adopted the UNP symbol in the 1993 Provincial Council elections when the CWC won seventeen seats. Seven members were elected in the parliamentary elections with an additional two (including S. Thondaman) being appointed as members of parliament on the National List, the CWC effectively holding nine seats. The 6 April 1999 Provincial Council elections again underlined the importance of the plantation vote in the Uva, Sabaragumawa and Central Provinces where twelve out of the 136 members elected were Tamils of Indian Origin.⁶

During the 1994 election campaign, the People's Alliance (PA)—a coalition of parties and groups led by the SLFP under the leadership of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, daughter of two former Prime Ministers—explicitly committed itself to working for reconciliation, peace and human rights. Referred to as 'A Vote for Good Governance', the PA obtained 105 seats in the 1994 elections while the UNP got 81 seats (Samarasinghe 1994: 1019). In spite of not obtaining the necessary

⁵ See Anon., 'Presidential Elections, 19.12.1988.' Available at <http://www.sselections.gov.lk/pdf/1988%20Presidential.pdf> (accessed 17 November 2014).

⁶ The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) won eight seats, the Up-Country People's Front (UCPF) won two seats in Central Province, while the United National Party's (UNP) Tamil nominees were elected to the Central and Uva Provinces.

majority (113 out of 225 seats), the PA was able to win over the support of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (seven seats) and the Tamil plantation representative from the Up-Country People's Front, gaining thereby a simple majority.⁷

The Ceylon Workers Congress used its strategic role as the main trade union on the plantations to influence and attain maximum benefits with regard to power and ministerial positions in the different governments, even if the ideological bases for the alliances were not always consistent. Thondaman served as, minister under four Presidents, J. R. Jayewardene, Ranasinghe Premadasa, D. B. Wijetunge and Chandrika Kumaratunga. Although the CWC had initially extended its support to the UNP in the 1994 presidential elections, S. Thondaman subsequently supported the new People's Alliance (PA) and in 1995 became a minister in the Kumaratunge Cabinet. This switchover gave rise to an ironical situation in parliament. While Thondaman was the Minister of Livestock Development and Estate Infrastructure, his colleagues sat in the opposition. Until his demise in 1999, Thondaman continued to support Kumaratunga, at times against the wishes of other CWC colleagues.

The PA lost its majority in 2001 when twelve MPs from the ruling coalition withdrew their support and elections were held in December 2001. The UNP, under Ranil Wickremesinghe, came back into power, although Kumaratunga remained President. However, this situation proved difficult and in November 2003, there was another major change in the government as the President Kumaratunga took over the important ministerial positions of Defence, Media and Information and the Interior, and suspended parliament. Parliament was subsequently dissolved. Three months later in January 2004, the PA and the JVP came together to form the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and won the parliamentary elections on 2 April 2004. A government under Mahinda Rajapakse was formed with the support of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), a new grouping consisting mainly of extreme nationalist Buddhists including monks, and the Eelam People's Democratic Front (EDPF). He was elected the president in 2005 and Ratnasiri Wickramanayake became the prime minister.

Recognising the strategic electoral value of the plantation vote, as well as the need to ensure the financial contribution of the sector, the government invited the leaders of the unions to taken up ministerial positions. The plantation leadership, on its part, was aware of its bargaining

⁷ In addition, it also received support from three smaller Tamil parties from the northeast on the condition that it seriously tried to solve the ethnic conflict.

position and used this advantage to negotiate for more representation in the government. In August 2006, Arumugam Thondaman of the CWC (S. Thondaman's grandson) was made Minister of Youth Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development while Periyasamy Chandrasekaran, who had broken away from the CWC and formed the Up-Country Democratic Front (UDF), became Minister of Socio-Development and Development of Socio-Equality. Muthu Sivalingam (CWC) became Deputy Minister of National Building and Infrastructure Development and M. Sachchithanandam (CWC) was made Deputy Minister for Education, while P. Radhakrishnan (UDF) became Deputy Minister for Vocational Training. The CWC withdrew its support from the government and all five of its members resigned in August 2007, citing political differences but rejoined in October 2007 when Thondaman was sworn in as Minister of Youth Empowerment and Socio-economic Development. The value of the plantation vote was reinforced in January 2010 when Mahinda Rajapakse stood for re-election and with the support of the CWC won by a margin of 18 per cent, which was followed by parliamentary elections where the UPFA coalition was able to get 144 out of 225 seats (the remaining were secured by the United National Front—60 seats,⁸ Tamil National Alliance—14 seats and the Democratic National Alliance—7 seats).

As a result, there was a marked improvement in the political representation of plantation leaders at different levels of governance. As more members of the plantation community participated in national politics and exercised their voting rights they had greater influence on local and national elections. From having no representation in local and national government in 1952, their representatives in government increased to eleven members in 2010, including in the Central, Uva and Western Provincial Councils and Pradeshiya Sabhas (Devaraj 2010: 120).

REPRIVATISATION AND PROTESTS

The increased political power of the plantation workers had strengthened the labour movement as well as its capacity to take strike action to defend their rights, and this was clearly manifested when the plantations were reprivated. The UNP government, under the influence of the World Bank and other financial institutions, in a bid to improve the productivity and

⁸ A coalition of the United National Party, the Democratic People's Front and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress.

profitability of the plantation sector and reform the management structure, initiated a process of privatisation of the plantations.⁹ During the first phase, which began in 1992, the land under the state owned-plantations, the Janatha Estate Development Board (JEDB) and the Sri Lanka State Plantations Corporation (SLSPC) were divided into twenty-three Regional Plantation Companies (RPCs). The latter had had agreements with private companies (Management Agents) on a profit-sharing basis for an initial period of five-and-half years with the possibility of renewal for four such extensions depending on the performance record of the company. Inherent in these contractual obligations was the problem that the 'insistence on longer-term profitability and corporate planning contradicted with the short initial time-frame it stipulated' (Shanmugaratnam 1997: 25). In 1995, the process of privatisation was taken one step further. The newly elected People's Alliance (PA) government led by Chandrika Kumaratunga allowed foreign capital to participate in the bidding process, and gave the management of the six profitable companies the option to buy 51 per cent of the share capital in the companies managed by them, while extending the lease period to 50 years.

But privatisation had major consequences for the rights of unions. One of the most significant achievements of the 1984 strike had been the reinforcement of the right to 300 days of work for registered workers. Furthermore, the plantation workers had also been granted increases in wages in 1992 and 1993 to compensate for the rising costs of living, 'thanks to the united stand of the unions' as well as the 'political clout' of the CWC, with its leader Thondaman a minister in the government (Shanmugaratnam 1997: 26). But such costs were considered excessive by the management companies, and the unions accused them of not honouring these agreements, complaining that amongst other issues, workers were forced to retire early, that line-rooms were not adequately maintained, and gratuities were not paid to retired workers, resulting in workers undertaking 'sporadic and spontaneous acts' of protests which the CWC leader Thondaman referred to as 'new modes of labour grievance articulation' (Shanmugaratnam 1997: 27-28). In 1996, the government proceeded with privatising tea and rubber estates (after pledging during the campaign that this would not take place).

A study done by the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) showed that there were important differences between the RPCs and the privately

⁹ By 1991, Sri Lanka's plantation sector was worse off than its competitors, India and Kenya in terms of land and labour productivity, as well as profitability (Shanmugaratnam 1997: 15).

owned and managed estates with regard to 'living conditions, labour outputs, welfare and wages, productivity, management style' with the result that households and communities in the private estates experienced a high prevalence of all the dimensions of poverty (2005: 49). According to Janaka Biyanwila, the new companies 'amplified the fragmentation of unions' by estate-based and not sector-level collective agreements (2011: 63). At the same time, the new management/owners 'delinked their obligations to maintain and coordinate social provisioning such as housing, education health and welfare services' (Biyanwila 2011). Significantly, and directly in contradiction to the gains made in the previous decade, the number of days of work was often reduced, casual workers were dismissed after a period of six months, and even staff were employed on a temporary basis (Biyanwila 2011: 63).

The CEPA study also indicated that 22 per cent of the households sampled on privately-owned estates felt that their living conditions had deteriorated since the 1990s—this figure was only 7 per cent for households in the RPC-owned estates (2005: 49). The majority of the workers felt that the management reform had led to 'lack of competence in agriculture and production and lack of care in human resource management' leading to a 'deterioration in livelihoods' (CEPA 2005: 68). Among the problems highlighted were problems in accessing the EPF as well as the management applying higher norms while making fewer workers to do the same job (CEPA 2005: 69). Trade unions were viewed as 'part of the patron-client structure' and not always working in favour of the workers. The following sections consider what these have meant for the political, economic and social progress of the plantation community and its members at the aggregate levels while clearly recognising that there were differences among estates in terms of availability and quality of social welfare and rights.

From 1995 onwards, there were increased protests by all unions in the plantation sector who felt that their rights to housing, employment and social welfare facilities would no longer be guaranteed by the management and could therefore be under threat.¹⁰ The plantation workers (with the support of the CWC) went on a six-day strike on 22 April 1996 demanding higher wages and a minimum of 300 working days per employee per year. These demands were particularly significant as they had been gained

¹⁰ A study comparing the plantation sector before and after privatisation suggested that since 1994, the RPCs had kept the unit operating cost per kg lower than the daily wage rate and were able to generate profits from 1995 onwards (Loh et al. 2003: 739, 741).

through strike action in 1984 but were eroded through the privatisation of the plantations. The six-day strike was ended by the CWC indicating that it planned to pursue these demands. In February 1998 another nine-day strike took place—reported in the *Sunday Times* as the ‘biggest trade union action in plantation history’, supported by some twenty unions, including the Ceylon Workers’ Congress (CWC) and the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers’ Union (LJEWU) which was the main UNP union (*Sunday Times*, 15 February 1998). The strike ended with an agreement between President Kumaratunga and the leadership of the main plantation unions, the CWC and the LJEWU. This time, however, hundreds of plantation workers protested against the CWC and threw stones at its office, accusing it of selling them out (UNHCR 2004).

CHALLENGING THE CWC LEADERSHIP

While the CWC was the largest trade union on the plantations and commanded a large number of votes in the region, there were persons and groups that disagreed with the ideology and policies of the leadership as well as the authoritarian structure that characterised its functioning. One of the most important splits came about in 1956, leading to the formation of the DWC under the leadership of A. Aziz, who allied with the Left and was more concerned with international affairs. The CWC leadership was firmly in the hands of S. Thondaman, who assumed a more pragmatic approach in politics with the CWC remaining the main trade union on the plantations. The DWC, on the other hand, suffered further breakups as some of its key members such as S. M Subbiah and C. V. Velupillai left to join the Ceylon Plantation Workers Union and then returned to the CWC.¹¹ The devolution of government through the establishment of Provincial Councils under the Provincial Councils Act of 1987 and 1989, as well as the creation of further decentralised units with the provinces (*Pradeshiya Sabhas* and *Gramodaya Mandalas*, as well as Municipal and Urban Councils) gave scope for greater autonomy at the local level in key areas such as internal laws, education, provincial

¹¹ The divisions within the DWC appeared even during the lifetime of its founder, Abdul Aziz. After he passed away, his son Ashraf formed the Aziz Democratic Workers Congress, while the DWC remained under the leadership of the DWC General Secretary V. P. Ganesan, who later joined the CWC. The CWC also had further splits with the Hatton leader Vellayan leaving the CWC and forming the National Union of Workers, which for a brief while also included C. V. Velupillai, although the latter returned to the CWC (Vijayanathan 2007: 12–14).

housing and food supply (Leitan 1990: 17, 19), and resulted in broadening the base of plantation opposition.

These processes challenged the hegemony of the CWC and created splits in the trade union movement on the plantations, while creating greater space for democratic engagement of members of the plantation community in the political process. Important in this respect was the departure of Periyasamy Chandrasekaran who been elected vice president of the CWC in 1977, and who had played an important role in mobilising workers for Thondaman. But Chandrasekaran had differences with the CWC which resulted in his leaving in late 1980s and forming the Malaiyaha Makkal Munnani or the Up-Country People's Front (UPF) in 1990, which had an affiliated union, the Up-Country Workers' Front (UWF). Born in 1957 in Talawakelle and having studied in Highlands College in Hatton, Chandrasekaran and his party took on a more radical position than the CWC, no longer defining themselves in terms of their work as estate labour but in terms of their geographical space. As we shall see later, these ideas were increasingly associated with the rising consciousness amongst the plantation community of their own ethnic identity in the country.

Another internal split came with the departure of the General Secretary M. S. Sellasamy, who had been a leading figure in the CWC for nearly forty years and was described as 'affable, easily accessible, "man of the people" and a crowd-puller possessed of brilliant Tamil oratory' (Kandappah 2004). It was alleged that Sellasamy's departure was to allow Thondaman's grandson Arumugam Thondaman to 'rise to a position of power' in the CWC (Bass 2000: 2). Sellasamy, however, took the CWC to court regarding his situation and subsequently formed the Ceylon National Workers Congress (CNWC).

After S. Thondaman's death in October 1999, he was 'succeeded' by his grandson Arumugam Thondaman who had been the financial secretary to the CWC. There were, however, several key CWC persons who questioned his financial administration and by May 2000, five of the eight CWC MPs, (S. Sathasivam, S. Rajaratnam, V. Sennan, A. M. D. Rajan and P. P. Devaraj) demanded greater openness and accountability. When this was not acceded to, they left the PA alliance to contest parliamentary elections with the UNP (Bass 2000: 3). In the subsequent parliamentary elections in 2000, three members of the CWC—Arumugam Thondaman, S. K. Jegatheeswaran and Muthu Sivalingam—won on the PA alliance ticket, while Periyasamy Chandrasekaran and S. Sathasivam stood with the UNP. P. P. Devaraj, CNWC leader M. S. Sellasamy and K. Kanakaraj from the UCPF were given seats on the UNP National List. Other trade union and political leaders from the plantation region, such

as V. Radhakrishnan and P. Digambaram joined the governments headed by Mahindra Rajapaksha (2010) and Maithripala Sirisena (2015).

Daniel Bass (2000) noted that there were over fifty trade unions in the plantation sector that had split from the CWC. Based on his fieldwork, he highlighted the lack of communication between the workers and the leadership. He noted that estate workers were 'no longer the isolated, ignorant and illiterate population' as presumed by the previous leaders and that they were 'frustrated' that their views were not heard 'in the union decision-making' (Bass 2000:6).

UP-COUNTRY ETHNIC IDENTITY

The ethnic conflict also strengthened the political awareness in the plantation community, members of which had and claimed a distinct ethnic and regionally based minority identity in Sri Lanka. As discussed in Chapter 16, such views were expressed by youth groups, organisations and movements since the 1960s, partly in response to the growing Sinhala-Tamil tensions in the country. These ideas advanced over time and by the 1990s had coalesced into clear political demands, which acknowledged the linguistic (Tamil), religious (Hinduism) and even cultural similarities between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the plantation community, but emphasised also significant differences in terms of class and caste backgrounds. Such a perspective brought about the potential for both joint action as well as independent political demands with the other Tamil groups in the country.

Of importance in this respect was the formation of the Up-Country People's Front (UPF) in 1989, a trade union that was formed under the leadership of Periyasamy Chandrasekaran. The very name of the union signified a change from the more conservative association with plantation work and with India and expressed a more geographical claim for rights as citizens and as members of a distinct ethnic group in Sri Lanka. It broke away from the traditional identification of the Up-country Tamils with India (officially categorised as 'Indian Tamils' or 'Tamils of Recent Indian Origin') and took up the demands for devolution—issues that were at the heart of the peace process in the North and East of the country—for the Tamils in the up-country region as well. Chandrasekaran was a charismatic leader, who, while being detained in 1993 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, was elected as Provincial Councillor in 1994 from the Nuwara Eliya constituency. In the subsequent period until his death in 2010, Chandrasekaran was involved in parliamentary politics and took

up several ministerial positions in the subsequent period. He was an important supporter of the People's Alliance government under Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, and in 1994 was given the portfolio of Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce.¹² Like the CWC leadership, he too was involved in political alliances with the larger parties for elections and in 2003 was elected on the UNP ticket from Nuwara Eliya district.

The UPF leadership also saw clear links between the problems of the plantation community and the demands taken up by the more radical Tamil groups. In an interview in 2005, Chandrasekaran commented on his 'political rapport' with the LTTE, noting that the ethnic problem in the country was 'not confined to the North-East alone':

We consider that the ethnic problem of the North and East is closely related to the political problems of the up-country Tamils. Therefore, we are working on an agenda linking the problems of the two ethnic communities (*Ceylon Daily News*, 22 October 2005).

In spite of these potential alliances, the political representation on the basis of ethnic identity remained limited. As a group plantation workers continued to be marginalised economically, socially and politically and living, according to Lawrence, 'as a community without most of the necessary entitlements to full citizenship' (2011: 5). He noted that the high numbers of voters in the few electorates where the community was concentrated meant that they were not able to obtain their proportional share of sixteen members in the parliament (2011: 23). There was also similarly relative under-representation of the community in different levels of local government, leading to the proposal that the local government bodies should be redesigned in order to 'allow minorities fair and adequate representation' while protecting their 'identity and interests in the democratic process' (Lawrence 2011: 33). There were also claims for redistribution to the region with regard to educational support for the plantation community, which had been overlooked previously. The low numbers of graduates, post-graduates and professors from the community were significant in hindering employment opportunities for its members, and the 'long-standing demand' for a university in the Nuwara Eliya

¹² From 1994 to 1999, he was the Deputy Minister of Estate Housing, while in 2001, he became Minister of Estate and Infrastructure. He was the Minister of Community Development and Deputy Minister of Irrigation and Water Management between 2001 to 2004 and Minister of Community Development and Social Inequity Eradication from 2006.

district that could stimulate higher education for the region had been ignored (Devaraj 2010: 107; Lawrence 2011). Thus, in spite of progress on some fronts, social justice for plantation workers continued to reflect serious deficits.

DEEPENING DEMOCRACY

Many organisations took up claims for justice for the plantation workers as an important theme, highlighting the problems of poverty, lack of educational and other facilities on plantations, as well as ethnic, class and gender discrimination experienced by the community as a whole. As a result, a process of deepening democracy occurred, broadening political deliberation in society.

The earliest of these organisations was the Satyodaya (Dawn of Truth), set up in 1972 in Kandy, in the heartland of the tea plantations. Initiated as a secular research centre, Satyodaya responded to the needs of the plantation workers in the aftermath of the land reform programmes in the 1970s and in 1974 and set up the Coordinating Secretariat for Plantation Areas (CSPA) to document these problems while combining research work with action in order to mitigate the sufferings of the plantation workers and secure their rights (Caspersz 2004: 198). The Jesuit priest, Father Paul Caspersz, had influenced the philosophical and political orientation of Satyodaya.¹³ Professor Carlo Fonseka, in reviewing Caspersz' book, *A New Culture for a New Society* referred to the author as 'the radical priest', emphasising his commitment to improving the 'wretched living conditions of the plantation people who have certainly been the most ruthlessly exploited human beings in Sri Lanka in the past century and more' (Fonseka 2006). More recently, it moved directly into working with deepening democracy concerns such as strengthening civil society through the empowerment of marginalised groups, including women, as well as protecting and promoting the environment.

In 1991, through the initiative of activists, the Institute of Social Development was also set up in Kandy, implementing awareness raising

¹³ He was also involved in the formation of the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) in 1979, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious coalition of trade unions, religious, secular and grass roots movements in the country intent on promoting interracial justice and equality. Caspersz became its first president and undertook several fact-finding missions to the north and east of the country where ethnic conflict had taken a heavy toll on the population.

programmes and capacity building work promoting human rights, labour rights, housing and health, and the empowerment of women workers. A more recent initiative was the setting up of the Plantation Sector Social Forum, a network of the civil society organisations, trade unions, NGOs, women's groups and academics working in the plantation sector, set up during the World Social Forum in Bombay 2003 (Plantation Sector Social Forum 2004). The Forum assumed a more direct rights-based approach highlighting among other issues, the rights of the plantation workers to education, gender equality, health, sanitation and housing, and economic development. What was interesting was these recent initiatives highlighted the concerns of the plantation workers at international levels.

The Foundation for Community Transformation (FCT) focused on promoting understanding and dialogue on state reforms for Tamils of Indian origin. It was created under the leadership of P. P. Devaraj, who had been associated for decades with both trade union and parliamentary politics on the rights of plantation workers. While he had originally been involved with Left politics, he subsequently supported S. Thondaman, whose pragmatic politics he admired. Devaraj was a member of parliament between 1989 and 2001 and was the State Minister for Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs from 1989 to 1994. In 2002, he formed the FCT, which was concerned with promoting a multi-ethnic and multicultural society in Sri Lanka. Devaraj has written extensively on plantation workers, including a book titled *Constitutional Electoral Reform Proposals and Indian Origin Tamils* (2008). Some of the main concerns of the FCT included promoting exchange and debate amongst various groups such as trade unions, civil society, young intelligentsia, minority and human rights activists and campaigners who were working amongst the plantation community. In addition, the FCT was keen to develop ways and means by which the Tamil community in the up-country region could access political power sharing and representation.

One could argue that these and other similar initiatives reflected a process of deepening democracy in the plantation community. As Jayadeva Uyangoda noted, the demands of the up-country Tamil community included 'voices of political and social activists who were intent on 'articulating a specific state reform agenda from below, from the perspective of an ethnic minority who has suffered, and continues to suffer, discrimination, poverty, as well as social and political exclusion' (2011: 1). He highlighted the significance of the debates amongst political activists on the conceptual formulation of their community and the increasing shift towards labelling themselves as 'Up-country

Tamils'—a regional-territorial identity—which was a break from the more conventional way of addressing themselves as 'Indian Tamils' or 'Tamils of Recent Indian Origin.' There were also discussions on whether they should be viewed as an 'ethnic minority' or a 'nationality group.' The demands of the community included proper implementation of the language—the constitution provided parity of both Sinhalese and Tamil—while their concerns included security, adequate political representation at different (local, regional and national) levels and the claim to development rights. However, according to Uyangoda, continuing problems of 'incomplete citizenship, partial national integration, weak nation-building and thin democracy' also influenced the political debate among social activists and the intelligentsia with the plantation 'community's collective political rights' going 'beyond citizenship and trade union rights' (2011: 11–12).

The social and political concerns of the plantation community were also taken up by avant garde writers who challenged some abusive and exploitative practices in the community, issues that were not taken up by politicians and other leaders for fear that they might lose their political support. These forms of protest were registered in the form of novels, short stories, poems and films. Several creative writers increasingly highlighted among other problems the inequities of the caste system, alcoholism and domestic violence. Such cultural interventions often went hand in hand with greater assertion of the identity of the plantation people and their community, thus enhancing deliberative democracy. The writer, Teliwatte Joseph for instance, assumed this name to emphasise his origin (Teliwatte being the name of the estate he came from) and reflected on the exploitation on the plantations associated with caste and domestic violence. The Tamil national newspapers, with a wide circulation in the plantation areas, frequently commented on such social problems on estates. Many anti-feudal themes and social evils were also topics in south Indian films, which were regularly viewed by the plantation community.

Unfortunately, the issue of caste-based exclusion was not taken up in the main discourses on the discrimination and disadvantage experienced by the plantation community. Such an attitude prevailed in Sri Lanka as a whole, where according to J. Uyangoda, there were 'public conversations on class-based inequality and injustice, but not caste-based inequality and injustice' (2000: 14). But it would appear that the structural factors have contributed to both the erosion, and to some extent also the persistence of caste in some aspects. The 'high castes' had more links with their kin in other estates and towns, and continued to maintain their ties with

their ancestral villages, even visiting these places for 'social and ritual purposes', while the 'low caste' remained more isolated on the estates (Balasunderam et al. 2009: 82). It was not surprising therefore that the Indo-Ceylon Agreements on citizenship and repatriation as well as the increasing ethnic hostility which culminated in the 1983 anti-Tamil riots resulted in many relatively 'upper-caste' groups opting to go back to India and effectively 'truncating the caste hierarchy' in favour of the 'low castes' (Balasunderam, Chandrabose and Sivapragasam 2009). Ethnographic research in 2007 suggested that the younger generation was less concerned about caste, with many, particularly men, considering discussions of caste as 'useless' as it 'had nothing to do with their day-to-day lives' (Balasunderam, Chandrabose and Sivapragasam 2009: 86). The caste order on the plantations became less rigid through the increased movement of people out of the estates. Young people often did not 'talk' or even 'know' their caste background and it became a consideration only in marriage (91). There was also no discrimination practised with regard to religious activities (92–93). In some ways, the emerging ethnic identity as persons from the Malayaha or up-country region also prevailed over association of persons by caste (Balasunderam, Chandrabose and Sivapragasam 2009: 95).

Caste-based exclusionary practices that were advantageous to those considered themselves 'higher' on the status scale had less meaning in the light of their dwindling numbers on the plantations in Sri Lanka. These changes also paved the way to challenge the authority of the so-called 'high caste elite' in trade unions and political parties. But the pervasive entrenchment of caste in the cultural, religious and social lives of the plantation community meant that it was not easy to fully counter its power in politics and the higher castes continued to dominate the leadership of the trade union and political parties (Balasunderam, Chandrabose and Sivapragasam 2009: 83). It would appear that caste also played a role in the decision on which political party a person from the community wished to support (Bass 2013: 113). The main trade union on the plantations, the CWC, continued to be under the leadership of the Kudiyanavar caste, even though this group was a minority on the plantations (Balasunderam, Chandrabose and Sivapragasam 2009: 92).

In these different ways, the ethnic conflict from the 1990s had a profound effect on the plantation community. Not only was it exposed to anti-Tamil violence and general insecurity, but this volatile situation also opened up spaces for it to challenge established relations of power and practice in politics and gave rise to greater awareness of its unique ethnic

identity as a separate geographically-based group in the country. Plantation workers were involved not just in class-based trade union activities but also in claims based on ethnicity, with a wide range of other actors, such as NGOs and civil society organisations, taking up their concerns and supporting them at local, regional, national and international levels. These different processes led to deepening democratic engagement within the plantation community, defying longstanding hierarchies in trade unions and politics.

Unless some of the most fundamental factors of the structure that characterise the 'plantation system' are addressed, only a limited amount of movement can be achieved by estate sector households. The captive feature of the 'plantation system' is the most critical factor that limits movement and, more importantly, creates a strong feeling of marginalisation.

(Centre for Poverty Analysis 2005:12).

The social deprivation of workers on the plantations had been a point of concern for several 'outsiders' in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and they had demanded that the state ameliorate the slave-like conditions of work and life on estates (see Part II of this book). Not only were workers poorly paid and tied by bonds of indebtedness but the housing, health, education and other social facilities had also been historically the worst in the Island. However, the mobilisation and collective action of the plantation workers and their unions had, by the twenty-first century, resulted in progress on labour and democratic rights. But what do these achievements signify for legal entitlements of plantation workers and the quality of their lives on the estates and in the wider society? Did the granting of political citizenship mean that the plantation community also experienced what T. M. Marshall had referred to as 'social citizenship', reflecting a whole range of rights, 'from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society' (2009 [1950]: 149)? Did they enjoy social justice along the principles developed by the political philosopher John Rawls, who emphasised the importance of all persons having equal access to social primary goods such as

liberty, opportunity, income, wealth and self-respect (1972: 303)?¹ Did the plantation community, as a specific ethnic identity group in the country, experience social justice through the 'politics of recognition' which Nancy Fraser argued was as a complementary form of social justice (1991, 2007, 2011)?

While these are fundamental issues to benchmark the social gains of the plantation community and to compare their achievements with other groups in the country, quantitative and qualitative, research remain limited. Part of this lack of information reflects the neglect of the welfare facilities in the plantation sector as a whole, and difficulty in obtaining viable statistics which can be compared over a period of time. These difficulties were compounded by the economic volatility, ethnic conflict, structural shifts in ownership, as well as political instability in the country which had resulted in poor comparative data bases and witnessed even the government using selective (and sometimes wrong) statistics to justify and uphold its policies.

Of importance in this regard are the data generated in the UNDP Human Development Reports (HDRs), the latter being inspired by the capability approach pioneered by the Indian economist-philosopher Amartya Sen in the 1980s, which focused on the quality of the lives of people through considering what they were actually able to be and to do.² Capability within this perspective reflected the freedoms and opportunities of people to improve the quality of their lives, a process defined as human development.³ Taking over these ideas, the first HDR

¹ A government following the principles of justice would, according to Rawls, ensure that certain basic social necessities were available to all persons, and furthermore that its policies did not worsen the situation of the most vulnerable in society.

² The capability approach has been widely debated and developed since the 1980s, by various authors, notably Martha Nussbaum, who listed ten human capabilities which she argued should be entrenched as entitlements in national constitutions and legislation (2003). Sen has countered the argument for listing a set of capabilities by highlighting the importance of 'public discussion and reasoning' that could 'lead to a better understanding of the role, reach and significance of particular capabilities' (Sen 2005: 160).

³ Defined in terms of the range of achievements a person can be and do, as well the freedom to choose between these different possibilities, expansion of capabilities was viewed as an important alternative to GDP per capita as a measurement of development. Influenced by these ideas, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated a series of Human Development Reports from 1990 highlighting changes in capabilities in different countries, focusing among others, on the basic capabilities such as the leading long and

of 1990 defined human development as 'a process of enlarging people's choices', the most critical of which were 'to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living'. In 2001, another capability, of being able to participate in the life of the community was included as also being of a 'basic' character.⁴ Some of these basic capabilities were calculated for Sri Lanka, the first national HDR in the country being undertaken in 1990. These capabilities reflect to some extent justice-related indicators, in line with, as previously discussed, priorities given to social citizenship by Marshall and social justice by Rawls.⁵ Under these circumstances, changes in basic capabilities in the Sri Lanka UNDP Human Development Reports available since 1990 are used as proxy indicators of the achievements of the plantation community in the most fundamental aspects of social justice and social citizenship.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The historical neglect on the part of the government regarding social development on the estates was somewhat ameliorated since the 1970s. Subsequent to the nationalisation of the plantations under the Land Reform Laws of 1972 and 1975, the Social Development Division (SSD) was set up by the government in 1978, under guidance of the Ministry of Health, to care for the welfare needs of estate population. This was also the year that S. Thondaman, the leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress, became a cabinet minister with the clear mandate to improve the lives of his constituency. The restructuring of the plantations in 1992 under twenty-three companies led to the setting up of the Plantation Housing and Social Welfare Trust, which in 2002, was established as the Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) to 'to co-ordinate and facilitate

healthy lives, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. Regional and country level reports have also formed an important source to assess the ways in which people's lives had improved or deteriorated.

⁴ But neither Amartya Sen nor the HDRs are explicit on the standards of these achievements, a criticism made by Nussbaum who noted that while comparisons with regard to health and education achievements were provided, they are 'basically silent' about the levels of these capabilities that can be considered as fundamental entitlements for all citizens in a just society (Nussbaum 2003: 5).

⁵ Sen did not argue that capabilities had to be entitlements in a just society. Nussbaum has in fact criticised Sen and the Human Development Reports on this issue (Nussbaum 2003).

programmes to enhance the quality of life of the one million Plantation Community.⁶ It functioned as a tripartite body of the government, the regional plantation companies and the plantation unions, collaborating with relevant organisations working in the plantation sector on infrastructural and social development programmes for the estate workers. But the PHDT did not have 'have direct authority over the provision of health care and welfare on the estates' and essentially only monitored standards of health with the possibility of initiating new programmes (UNDP 2013: 7).

In 1997 a separate division for Estate Infrastructure was created with a focus on the social development on the plantations, and received budgetary allocations for sectoral programmes. It was amalgamated with the Ministry of Housing in 2002, under A. Thondaman, with P. Chandrasekaran being put in charge of the Ministry of Community Development. In 2005, the latter ministry became the Ministry of Estate Housing Infrastructure and Community Development and obtained allocations for housing, water supply roads and other community-related services. In 2006–07 the ministry was taken up under the Ministry of Nation Building until 2010, when following the general elections, the Estate Infrastructure Division was abolished and the deputy minister in charge absorbed into the new Ministry of Economic Development.

M. Vamadevan, the former Secretary of the Ministry of Estate Housing, Infrastructure and Community Development, noted that between 2006 and 2010 'the financial allocation and development initiatives in respect of social development were at their peak' (M. Vamadevan, *Sunday Times*, 2 February 2011, made available by the author). The Ministry of Nation Building and Estate Infrastructure Development were responsible for housing and infrastructure, including roads, water supply and electricity. Furthermore, several representatives from the plantation community were allocated important government positions and also influenced social programmes in the plantation sector. Arumugam Thondaman and P. Chandresekaran were ministers of Youth Empowerment and Community Development respectively, while there were some six deputy ministers from the plantation community in the several other key ministries such as education, health, vocational training, postal, justice and national integration, and as a result, some more development activities were initiated. According to Vamadevan, the abolition of the Estate Infrastructure reflected a 'shift in the political

⁶ The Plantation Human Development Trust website is available at www.phdt.org.

bargaining power of the plantation community and government political and development strategy' (*Sunday Times*, 2 February 2011).

DEFICITS IN ENTITLEMENTS

In spite of these influences the plantation community continued to experience discrimination in terms of entitlements and rights. P. P. Devaraj has argued that while *de jure* citizenship had been granted, a large number continued not to enjoy *de facto* citizenship, experiencing difficulty in even obtaining basic documents such as identity cards, resulting in several persons who had the right to vote being excluded from voters' lists (2010: 107). There was also evidence that some workers also had problems in obtaining birth, marriage and death certificates (Gunatilaka, Wan and Chatterjee 2009: 2). M. Vamadevan also pointed out the 'glaring disparity' in the entitlements of the plantation community, who formed the fourth national ethnic group, with regard to housing and land rights, political representation and educational opportunities. According to him, while the workers enjoyed *de facto* ownership rights over their homesteads on the plantations, they did not have *de jure* rights over them, and on leaving, had no rights of ownership to these buildings even if they had repaid the housing loan which had been obtained against their employment provident funds (M. Vamadevan, personal communication, 14 January 2014). He pointed out that there were also 'legal snags' for the plantation community to hold posts in the Pradheshiya Sabha as Section 33 of the Pradheshiya Sabhas Act of 1987 hindered the free operation of the Sabhas in the estates.

Another area of unequal entitlements was with regard to employment in the government sector where there were very few representatives of the plantation community, because only a few had attained higher education and could thus qualify for the entrance tests for the Sri Lankan Administrative Service (SLAS), the Sri Lankan Planning Service (SLPS) and the Sri Lankan Overseas Service (SLOS). Vamadevan pointed out that there had been a demand from the plantation community for a separate University to promote research and to enhance the admission, similar to the Jaffna University that catered for the Tamils in the North and Eastern University that responded to the needs of the Muslims in the region (personal communication, 14 January 2014).

It is important to note that the increase in political representation up to eleven members, while significant, did not reflect the plantation community's proportional share in the parliament, which should have been in the order of sixteen members (Lawrence 2011: 23). Nor was

the representation proportional to their numbers in local government in spite of proposals put forward by representatives of the plantation community that local government bodies should be redesigned in order to 'allow minorities fair and adequate representation' while protecting their 'identity and interests in the democratic process' (Lawrence 2011: 33). Thus, in terms of access to basic liberties as put forward by Rawls as well as parity of representation as suggested by Fraser, social justice and entitlement deficits continued to exist for both individual workers as well as for the plantation community as a whole, well into the second decade of the twenty-first century.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Sri Lanka has always had a good track record of human development and its achievements with regard to basic capabilities were, at the all-Island level, consistently higher than warranted for its level of GDP per capita. These figures were, no doubt, the outcome of investment by governments in education and health, which had resulted in striking improvements in literacy and life expectancy. The country was also viewed as an 'early achiever' of the Millennium Development Goals such as universal primary school enrolment, gender parity in school enrolment, under-five mortality rates and universal provision of reproductive health services (Gunatilaka, Wan and Chatterjee 2009: vii, 6). The following subsections consider how the plantation community has fared in terms of basic capabilities.

Education

During much of the colonial and post-Independence period, the governments and the management had given little or no priority to formal education on plantations. Till the 1970s, superintendents, who were in charge of the schools on the estates, viewed them as spaces to keep children occupied rather than as a means for upward mobility, and even saw education as a threat to their labour force. Parents and the community, in line with the accepted gender division of labour, also pressured girls to take on household chores and support their mothers, while some also seeing them as a source of much needed income, which could be earned if they worked as tea pluckers (Kurian 1982: 108–11).

But the nationalisation of the estates in the 1970s, while initially resulting in a deterioration of living and working conditions, brought the educational facilities under government purview. The increasing

power of the trade unions and in particular the CWC also served to stimulate education on the estates. As a result, there came about a change from the 1980s and the 1990s onward, with greater investment in improving the education of estate children. In her study on education in the plantations, Angela Little emphasised the important role of S. Thondaman, the leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress, in mobilising foreign donors to support schools on the plantations, thereby promoting education amongst the estate workers (1999: 254). She noted that as a result of such interventions, parents, teachers and superintendents cited a range of indicators, including educational levels, greater interest on the part of parents in their children's education and better buildings and other facilities, as reflecting progress with regard to education since nationalisation (Little 1999: 182).

These factors were important in increasing the literacy rates in the subsequent period, with better school attendance and more students moving into higher education (Devaraj 2010: 120). Male and female literacy rates on the estates were 80 and 58.1 per cent respectively in 1986–87, the equivalent figures rising to 88.3 and 74.7 per cent by 2003–04 (World Bank 2007: 90, Table 8.1) These figures are particularly significant as the estate households, and particularly the young men and women in the sector, realised that education was an important means of upward mobility in spite of concerns that education did not always result in employment opportunities (World Bank 2007: 92).

Clearly, however, given the historical disadvantages suffered by the plantation workers with regard to education, they continued to lag behind the national standards. 24 per cent of estate children attended pre-schools compared to the all-island rate of 62 per cent; the figures for secondary education are 58 per cent vs. 69 per cent, and for post-secondary education, the extremely low rate of 3 per cent for plantations as compared to 9 per cent Island wide (World Bank 2007: 2). The Demographic and Health Survey for 2006–07 also showed that the number of years that estate children stayed at school was considerably less than in other sectors. While the median period of schooling was five years in plantations, the equivalent figures for the urban and rural sectors were 9.2 and 9 years respectively (Department of Census and Statistics: 2009: 12). In spite of progress with regard to education, there remained clear deficits with regard to social justice for the plantation community in terms of this capability. The education index in the Human Development Index of 2012 was lowest for Nuwara Eliya district, the residence of the majority of plantation workers (UNDP 2012: 16). The disparity was particularly notable in the case of students at the university level. While some 25,000 students were admitted

into national universities, the proportion from the plantation community was less than 1 per cent, a glaring anomaly as higher education is free in the country (M. Vamadevan, personal communication, 14 January 2014).

Health

The estate community had historically been associated with deficits in social justice with regard to another basic capability—the ability to lead a healthy life. But government investment in healthcare in the Island, and also on the estates since the 1970s resulted, by the twenty-first century, in considerable improvements. As a result, infant mortality showed a sharp decline from 49.6 per 1,000 live births in 1985 to 19.1 in 2000 and to 16.9 in 2007 (UNDP 2012: 7). Between 1985 and 2000, institutional births rose from 60.8 per cent to 96 per cent (although maternal mortality rates increased from 1.2 per cent to 1.8 per cent). Another significant improvement was in the low birth weight which fell from 42 per cent to 14.5 per cent between 1985 and 2000 (UNDP 2012: 7). In spite of this progress, the estate sector lagged behind the other sectors in key indicators of health. According to the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) of 2006–07, the under-five mortality rate on the estates in 2006–07 was 33 deaths per 1,000 births, which was an improvement from the past but still considerably higher than the equivalent figures for urban (19 deaths per 1,000 births) and rural (23 deaths per 1,000 birth) sectors (Department of Census and Statistics 2009: 97). Furthermore, the situation worsened in some instances. The incidence of low birth weight in the estates sector increased from 21 per cent in the DHS 2000 to 31 per cent in the DHS 2006–07 (2009: 122). The children were particularly vulnerable to poor health and stunting and fared far worse than their urban and rural counterparts on several key counts.⁷

Poor health was also no doubt related to the living conditions on the estates. The DHS 2006–07 showed that toilet and sanitary facilities were worse on the estates than in the urban and rural sectors as was the quality of housing and overcrowding.⁸ The nutrition levels and healthcare facilities available to women also showed that women on the estates had

⁷ The level of stunting in estate children was 40 per cent, which was nearly three times as higher than in the urban areas (14 per cent) and the rural areas (16 per cent) (Department of Census and Statistics 2008: 138–39).

⁸ The DHS showed that 9 per cent of households on the estates had no access to any toilet facility, a figure that was higher than the all-Island level of 2 per cent. Only 66 per cent of households enjoyed improved sanitary facilities as compared with 78 per cent and 85 per cent in the urban and rural

still a way to go before they reached parity with their urban and rural counterparts. These differences were evident in terms of ante-natal services, Body Mass Index, access to clean water, teenage pregnancies and reproductive rights.⁹ Studies have shown that girls experienced intra-household discrimination with regard to getting access to nutrition and health services with the estate sector being 'by far the worst off' (Gunatilaka, Wan and Chatterjee 2009: 6).

Maternity services had improved on the estates, and in the early 1980s, there were separate maternity wards where women were allowed to come a few days before the birth and where care was provided for them (Kurian 1982: 105). The medical officer was often sympathetic, allowing them to stay longer in the hospital if necessary. The nurses and midwives were experienced, the conditions in the hospitals were good and appreciated by the women and the cost of food, drugs and other services was paid by the estate. In addition, women also received a maternity benefit of forty-two days' pay to help them recover after the birth (Kurian 1982: 105). These payments have improved with the maternity benefits in 2012 standing at eighty-four days' leave and seventy-two days' salary payment for the first two children, and forty-two days' leave and thirty-six days' payment for the third and fourth children (Menaha Kandasamy, personal communication 4 September 2012). The standards of the maternity wards were not always maintained and women from the estates were often forced to use to services of the district hospitals.¹⁰ Serious concerns were raised about the long distances

sectors respectively, while 22 per cent of households in the estate sector had earthen floors with dung while nearly 90 per cent of households in Sri Lanka had more durable flooring made of cement, tiles, or finished wood (2009: 17, 19). Overcrowding was more prevalent in the estate sector with 56 per cent of the estate homesteads having just one room whereas the all-Island figure was 31 per cent (2009: 19).

⁹ Women on estates reported much more difficulty in getting care (77 per cent), this figure being nearly twice as high as women in other sectors (Department of Census and Statistics 2009: 117–18). The survey also considered the issue of adolescent pregnancy as a 'major social and health concern' as teenage mothers were more likely to suffer complications, be emotionally immature, also and face greater obstacles to receiving further education. The all-Island figure revealed that just 6 per cent of the adolescent girls between 15 and 19 years of age were mothers or pregnant across the Island but nearly 10 per cent of estate adolescents had begun childbearing by the same age (2009: 49).

¹⁰ Examples include the Brownswick, Yullifield and Velioya estates (Menaha Kandasamy, personal communication, 4 September 2012).

pregnant women had to travel to the hospital (Collective for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Sri Lanka 2010: 16).

Information and access to family planning and reproductive health had also increased from the 1970s onward as a result of consistent policy interventions and substantial aid by international donors. The reproductive rights of women were given additional emphasis as a result of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, which took place in Cairo. According to the Sri Lanka DHS 2006–07, the ‘high use of female sterilization in the estate districts of Nuwara Eliya and Badulla reflects the effectiveness of sterilization programmes’ (2009: 51). There remained however, conservative gender biases in the way the programmes were implemented. In the first place, information was largely disseminated only to married men and women, with the result that unmarried women found it difficult to enquire about or have access to birth control. As a result, it was not uncommon for some of them to resort to abortions and or to carry unplanned pregnancies to term.¹¹ This issue continued to be a matter of serious concern even up the second decade of the twenty-first century. Writing on the ‘Bitter Fate of Estate Women’, Ruwan Laknath Jayakody (2014) noted that ‘Poor access to healthcare, lack of knowledge on contraceptives and the mistrust placed on health workers, endanger the lives of women in the upcountry region, who are compelled to undergo unsafe abortions’. According to Jayakody, such practices were also a consequence of government policy on abortion:

Abortion is a controversial issue, particularly in a country where the practice is deemed illegal, except in rare cases where the mother’s life is in danger. However, it is no secret that, as a consequence, thousands of abortions take place around the country, under unsafe, insanitary conditions and performed by under qualified persons. Following such procedures, many women become infertile or in worst cases, meet untimely deaths (Jayakody 2014).

The increase in the numbers of unwanted pregnancies and abortions was also taken up by Sivaguru Saraswathi, elected member of the Central Provincial Council who cited the ‘lack of the most rudimentary knowledge about sexual behaviour and contraception among the women and girls

¹¹ These norms prevailed in the 1980s (Kurian 1989: 11) and were confirmed as being the same even in 2013 (Personnal communication—Menaha Kandasamy, 16 August 2013).

living in the estates as reason for the increase' as the primary reason (Jayakody 2014).

While women on the estates were keen to have children, they were also aware of the costs associated and felt the need to limit the size of their families. But the main emphasis lay on terminating rather than controlling fertility, largely through tubectomies or vasectomies. But the choice also reflected a gender bias. While both women and men were anxious about the operation, men often felt that a vasectomy could result in a 'certain loss of manliness and self-esteem' and their fertility was also important in case they wished to marry again (Kurian 1982: 112; Kandasamy, personal communication, 16 August 2013). The financial incentives for the tubectomy were also higher than for a vasectomy and it was therefore not unusual for women to be pressured to undergo the surgery in order to get the higher payment, which was used to pay a debt or meet other financial needs.¹²

The CEDAW shadow report of 2010 noted that women, due to inadequate education were at times not fully aware of the significance of sterilisation, and were 'susceptible to be pressurized by the husband or the economic benefit of the incentive payment' (Women and Media Collective 2010: 23). There were also reported cases of women's reproductive rights being denied through patriarchal attitudes by the management, which would deny them due maternity benefits when they were relocated to their husbands' estates or employ new married women only if they had undergone a pregnancy test to indicate that they were not pregnant (Philips 2005: 134).¹³

In a qualitative study undertaken in 2005, most of the workers felt that privatisation had resulted in the deterioration of healthcare facilities, with hospitals not functioning, inadequate equipment and difficulties in finding transportation to the local hospitals. None of the sampled estates had 'welfare officers, midwives or dispensaries' (CEPA 2005: 71–72).

Income and Poverty

The third basic capability and a fundamental social citizenship right is the means to enjoy a decent standard of living. Historically, the estate

¹² In 2013, a woman was given seven days of leave with salary, with some estates even providing extra Rs 500 for undergoing a tubectomy (Menaha Kandasamy, personal communication, 16 August 2013).

¹³ Maternity benefits for the first two pregnancies include 84 days of paid leave, while this number is reduced to 42 days with three or more children.

population had experienced extreme levels of poverty. As discussed earlier, the estate population was systematically discriminated against and experienced serious deprivation and even starvation during the 1970s. While there were attempts to improve the situation, the sector continued to have high rates of poverty in the twenty-first century and in 2002, these rates were much above the national average (National Plan of Action 2007: vi). Related to poverty was 'the deplorable situation of housing, water supply, and sanitation', including 'over-crowding of line rooms' and 'obsolete housing ... unfit for human habitation' (NPA 2007: 2).

Several studies have shown that poverty incidence in the estate sector remained the highest in the country. In 2003–04, the poverty incidence on the estates was double that in the rural sector, which was in turn twice as high as the urban sector. The highest share of poor people lived in the Central Province, where the main plantations were located (Gunewardena, Meedeniya and Shivakumaran 2007: 8). The situation worsened in the subsequent years with the official statistics indicating that the Poverty Head Count Index (HCI)—the proportion of poor population to total population—was 32 per cent with 26 per cent of the households on the estates being categorised as poor (Department of Census and Statistics 2009: 2, Table 1.1).¹⁴ In contrast, the urban sector had a HCI of 7 per cent with 5 per cent of households being classified poor, while the rural sector had an HCI of 16 per cent with 13 per cent of households being categorised as poor. The 'Poverty and Human Development' report (2009) published by the Asian Development Bank reported a similar situation (Gunatilaka, Wan and Chatterjee 2009: 3, Table 2).

In what can be viewed as a dramatic change, the official statistics provided by the Department of Census and Statistics based on the Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2009/10 reported a sharp improvement in poverty between the period 2006–07 to 2009–10, with considerable numbers, including those in the estate sector, moving out of poverty (Department of Census and Statistics 2013: 3, Table 1).¹⁵ In numerical terms, the census figures suggested that there was an overall

¹⁴ Department of Census and Statistics, 'Poverty in Sri Lanka (based on Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2006/07)', Colombo: Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2012. Available at <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/reportnew-Final.pdf> (accessed 14 November 2014).

¹⁵ Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Sri Lanka Poverty Review: A study of Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2009/10, Colombo, 2013.

reduction of poverty by 58 per cent between 2002 and 2009, with the poverty headcount ratio dropping from 22.7 per cent to 8.9 per cent.¹⁶ The review on poverty undertaken by the Ministry of Finance and Planning noted that the country had made remarkable progress in lowering the size of the poor population since 1995–96 and had even achieved the United Nations' first Millennium Development Goal (MDG1) of halving poverty in 2009–10 well before the target year of 2015 (Department of Census and Statistics 2013: 1).¹⁷

It emphasised that this improvement could be 'considered as an immense reduction in poverty since the number of poor has declined despite the natural growth in population and the increase in the number of districts covered by the survey since 2002' (Department of Census and Statistics 2013). It noted, however, that there was a 'high concentration of non-poor population just beyond the poverty line' who were 'highly vulnerable' as 'a small negative impact on their consumption can cause many of them to fall back in poverty that results in a large increase in poverty incidence' (2014: 3).¹⁸

The dramatic decreases in poverty, while being indicators of success, also provoked debate and concern.¹⁹ In commenting on this 41 per cent reduction in poverty over the three year period, the Centre for Poverty Analysis indicated it was 'the highest drop ever witnessed and likely to be a cumulative effect of the expansion and growth of the economy, and

¹⁶ The absolute poverty line (based on real monthly total food and non-food expenditure per capita) in 2002 was Rs 1,423, but was adjusted for inflation to a level of Rs 3,038 per person per month.

¹⁷ The high rate of economic growth put forward by the Department of Census and Statistics has come under controversy with an investigation inquiry indicating that those in authority requested a re-examination of the previously lower figure, and resulting in the growth figure being adjusted to a higher level. See *Daily Mirror*, 'Official Alleges Growth Rate Massaged', 24 December 2013. Available at www.dailymirror.lk/news/40662-official-alleges-growth-rate-massaged.html (accessed 13 November 2014).

¹⁸ Increasing numbers of teachers and other staff have begun to reside on the estates, taking advantage of the free housing and other available facilities. As this group earned a relatively higher income, it was likely that they influenced the average wage for this sector (M. Vamadevan, personal communication, 10 January 2014).

¹⁹ It is also likely that some of the data on welfare conditions was provided by the PHDT which monitored those estates that were under the companies, and thus did not take into account the situations of workers on the smaller estates, which were considerably worse (M. Vamadevan, personal communication 10 January 2014).

especially the pro-poor social and economic interventions of successive governments over the last many decades.²⁰ However, it criticised the total reliance on a single point measure of poverty such as the poverty line and suggested that it be supplemented by other data and also triangulated with other methods and sources of data collection.

The Poverty Head Count showed that the estate sector had witnessed a sharp decline from 32.0 per cent HCI in 2006–07 to 11.4 in 2009–10. (Department of Census and Statistics 2011: 1).²¹ Under the headline 'Estate sector recovers in style', it observed that as far as the estate sector was concerned the 'bitter increase of poverty in estate sector reported in 2006/07 was an eye opener towards the hard working estate population who contribute heavily to the growth of the country's export trade' and that the two-thirds drop in poverty in the estate sector was linked to the fall in the relative prices of food items, as well as increased income and wages since 2006/07. The CEPA was critical of this conclusion. It observed that the 'sharp reduction in money metric poverty in the estate sector' between 2006 and 2009 was 'not substantiated by other empirical data', thereby undermining the reliability of these numbers (*Island*, 15 September 2013). The *World Bank Review* suggested that the 'most dramatic declines' of poverty during this period were also the result of major wage hikes at the beginning of 2010.²² But calculations by independent scholars suggested that the majority of the workers were in the category just above the official poverty line and thereby vulnerable, with minor drawbacks of consumption, to fall back into poverty.²³

At a more fundamental level, the organisational structure of the plantation has proved tenacious, marginalising 'estate residents from the

²⁰ See Centre for Poverty Analysis, 'Poverty head count ratio—Sri Lanka', n.d. Available at <http://www.cepa.lk/index.php/en/poverty-head-count-ratio-sri-lanka> (accessed 17 November 2014).

²¹ Department of Census and Statistics, 'Poverty Indicators: Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2009/10', Colombo: Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2011. Available at http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/PovertyIndicators2009_10.pdf (accessed 14 November 2014).

²² See World Bank, 'Sri Lanka: An Overview', n.d. Available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/overview> (accessed 13 November 2014).

²³ According to A. S. Chandrabose (2011) of the Open University of Colombo, based on the actual pay slips of the tea workers by the companies in the last quarter of 2010, 25 per cent of the workers received between Rs 3,700 and 5,500 per month, with 45 per cent of the tea workers receiving between Rs 5,501 and Rs 8,500 and just 10 per cent of the workers receiving between Rs 10,001 and Rs 11,500 per month.

mainstream', while providing them inadequate welfare programmes and thereby being a 'critical constraint to poverty reduction' (World Bank 2007: 101–02). The cumulative effect of this isolation, the history of poverty and deprivation, as well as the extensive forms of labour control, have, at times, also gave rise to a degree of 'low self esteem' (UNDP 2007: 1). Estate work continued to be stigmatised not only by the wider Sri Lankan society, but also by some youth who rejected work on estates as 'degrading', even if the level of wages was higher than elsewhere (World Bank 2007: 101–02). Such negative views regarding the estates also reduced possibilities for the more educated youth from the estates to find suitable employment beyond the plantations (UNDP 2007: 1–2).²⁴

While underlining the need to 'actively' mainstream the plantations, the CEPA report on 'Moving out of Poverty in the Estate Sector in Sri Lanka' noted that:

Unless some of the most fundamental factors of the structure that characterise the 'plantation system' are addressed, only a limited amount of movement can be achieved by estate sector households. The captive feature of the 'plantation system' is the most critical factor that limits movement and, more importantly, creates a strong feeling of marginalisation (CEPA 2005: 12).

In conclusion, it is clear that in spite of important political, economic and social gains since the 1970s, the plantations have remained characterised by absolute and relative deprivation and disadvantage in relation to the urban and rural sectors on all vital aspects of life. Claims for social citizenship and social justice continue. Human development thus remains inadequate for both women and men workers on plantations as well as their families and community.

²⁴ Interviews with persons who have moved away from the estates suggest that the negative attitudes to estate work were even internalised by the members of plantation community. Having moved away from the plantations, they preferred to state that they come from the region or town (Hatton, Nuwara Eliya, etc.) rather than openly claim their plantation origins.

While outsiders, including urban liberals, the Indian government, the trade unions and other political leaders pressurised the Sri Lankan government to improve the conditions of work and pay on the plantations, they did not question women's subordination in the plantation hierarchy. In Chapters 1 and 4 we have argued that 'multiple and overlapping patriarchies' in race, caste, ethnicity, religion and cultural practices were also incorporated in the labour regime and social organisation on plantations, resulting in hegemonic masculinity which was sustained through cultural consent and acceptance of male authority. It was not surprising that most persons in authority, including the trade union and community leaders accepted patriarchy as the norm and did not challenge male authority and power over women, nor did they recognise or counter the disadvantages that women were exposed to in their lives.¹

An important consequence of these forms of discrimination was that as demonstrated in the previous chapter, women in the plantation community continued to be disadvantaged, not only vis-à-vis their male counterparts, but, also in relation to women in the rural and urban sectors in key capabilities. This discrimination also had a direct bearing on their role in

¹ One of the most important exceptions was the trade union leader Natesa Aiyar in the 1920s. More recently, S. Thondaman, president of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, had also taken up the demand in the 1970s and 1980s to remove the historical discrimination that women workers on the plantations had faced in terms of wages, and conditions of work. The demand for equal wages for women and men workers was taken up by unions and women's groups in the country during the UN 'Decade of Women' (1975-85) and granted in 1984 after strike action on the part of the majority of plantation unions in the country.

plantation politics. We will argue here that these gender biases prevented women from realising their full citizenship rights and hindered their participation in the political leadership, which did not prioritise demands that dealt with women-specific problems, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment. We then look at the experiences of women from the plantation community in the light of these discussions and the extent to which women have been able to challenge patriarchy in the hierarchies of their trade unions and political parties.

FACTORS HINDERING WOMEN'S POLITICS

Feminists have criticised deliberations on citizenship for sustaining gender inequalities in politics by dealing with decision-making and rights in the public sphere and not taking into account the power relations in the private sphere that influenced women's participation in politics. According to Hobson and Lister (2002), T. Marshall's classical understanding of citizenship was androcentric as it dealt with the struggles of the essentially male working class for social, economic and political rights, with women assuming a second-class citizenship status (Pateman 1988). Ignoring the so-called private sphere in public discourse has had the effect of not realising how women's subordinate position in the household could have a bearing on their political status and mobility, often leading to them not realising their full citizenship rights and their potential for political empowerment. Bina Agarwal and Pradeep Panda showed how (potential) domestic violence and other forms of harassment undermined the ability of a woman 'to be an active citizen or seek her entitlements as a citizen' (2007: 362).² Martha Nussbaum also noted that while women could have the 'nominal right of political participation' they may not be able to exercise this right if they are 'threatened with violence should they leave the home' (2003: 38).³ She criticised the traditional discourse

² Violence against women was, according to United Nations report 'The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics', a 'universal phenomenon' with women being 'subjected to different forms of violence—physical, sexual, psychological and economic—both within and outside their homes' (United Nations 2010: x).

³ According to Nussbaum, affirmative action and institutional support are necessary under these circumstances, suggesting that the capability approach, by 'focusing from the start on what people are actually able to do and to be' can 'foreground and address inequalities that women suffer inside the family: inequalities in resources and opportunities, educational deprivations, the failure of work to be recognized as work, insults to bodily integrity' (2003: 39).

of rights of inability to deal with gender inequalities and gender justice as it retained 'the traditional distinction' between a state-regulated public sphere and the private sphere, the latter being kept separate from the former (2003: 39).

The gendered division of labour also stemmed from expectations on women's work and responsibilities in the household and influenced their participation in politics. Nancy Fraser has argued that women were disadvantaged with regard to both distributive and status dimensions of social justice through being assigned responsibility for unpaid reproductive and domestic chores in the household, while sustaining a division of labour where men tended to dominate the higher paid and more 'skilled' jobs in the labour market. Such forms of gender inequalities stemmed from androcentrism, which resulted in 'an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that privileges traits associated with masculinity, while devaluing everything coded as "feminine"' (Fraser 2007: 26). This form of injustice was associated with women suffering from a range of gender-specific forms of status subordination such as sexual harassment and assault, domestic violence, and 'exclusion or marginalization in public spheres and deliberative bodies; and denial of the full rights and equal protections of citizenship' (Fraser 2007: 26). Redressing gender injustice therefore required, according to Fraser, 'changing both the economic structure and the status order.'

Martha Nussbaum also emphasised the importance of caring as a fundamental concern of gender justice as 'most of the caregiving for such dependents is done by women, often without any public recognition that it is work' (2003: 50). Thus, the division of labour, the valuation of work and power relations in the household meant that women did not have the time to participate in political activity at a more direct level as they had to undertake the household care work. At the same time, the lower valuation associated with this work meant that they were accorded a lower status than men even if they entered the public sphere. Kamla Bhasin has linked these injustices more directly to patriarchy, arguing that while it can take different forms which are subject to change over time it is often been used to justify lower wages and poor education for women, as well as sexual abuse and domestic violence (1993: 9).

These discussions, together with those of the previous chapter, have demonstrated that claims for political and gender justice and full citizenship rights of women workers need to challenge not only the unequal achievements, entitlements and opportunities in their paid work but also to recognise and to counter gender-based disadvantages in the so-called private domain that prevent them from exercising their democratic rights

as citizens on an equal basis. An important indicator of gender equality in politics is for women to participate effectively in the leadership of trade unions and political parties and influence policies and programmes in their favour as women workers and members of the community. The following section considers how power relations and practices in the private sphere have influenced women in plantation politics.

PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL VIOLENCE

Women on the Sri Lankan plantations have traditionally been and continue to be exposed to a high incidence of personal violence in their paid work and households. A study in 2001 by Kamalini Wijayatilake and Faizun Zackariya showed that sexual harassment continued to be a persistent feature of plantation life, with women being humiliated with verbal and physical abuse and experiencing stress, fear of violence, punishment and even loss of pay and facilities if they did not acquiesce to the sexual demands of men from all levels of the estate hierarchy (2001). Sexual harassment, legally defined in Sri Lankan law as 'unwelcome sexual advances by words or action used by a person in authority, in a working place or any other place'⁴ existed with impunity on the estates.

The study also showed that violence was prevalent 'within the family, the work place and in society reflecting unequal gender relations in these three spheres', resulting in 'a sense of vulnerability and lack of control over the situation as well as over one's self' and involving a range of complex negative feelings on the part of the victim, such as shock, anger, shame, humiliation, resentment, fear, helplessness, and psychological trauma (Wijayatilake and Zackariya 2001: 17–18). As women worked and lived within the boundaries of the estate, the 'workplace-homestead interface' created, according to the authors, a 'conducive environment for discrimination to take place' (Wijayatilake and Zackariya 2001: 22). The issue of domestic violence and sexual harassment remained 'non-issues', for both management and trade unions did not give it priority and the seriousness it deserved, and women lost confidence in the unions to take up their cause (Wijayatilake and Zackariya 2001: 26).

The Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey of 2006/07 showed that 'wife-beating' was accepted and even justified by the majority of women in Sri Lanka, suggesting that these attitudes were 'pervasive and trenchant' (Department of Census and Statistics 2009: 196). It

⁴ Section 345 of the Penal Code of 1995.

highlighted that 53 per cent of women justified husbands beating their wives in at least one of five scenarios—if she burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, and refuses sexual relations with him. (Department of Census and Statistics 2009: 196). The survey also expressed surprise that so many of the most educated respondents would consider violence against women to ever be acceptable. These figures reveal an alarming validation of patriarchal norms and practices in the country, with 46.8 per cent of women aged 15–49 in the urban sector in 2006–07 stating that a husband was justified in beating his wife—the equivalent figures in the rural and estate sectors being 54.5 per cent and 47.8 per cent respectively (Department of Census and Statistics 2009: 196). It is interesting to note that women on plantations had a higher perception of their right not to be beaten than their counterparts in the rural sector. It is likely that increased education and assertiveness have influenced these women in their opposition to domestic violence.

While physical violence against women was the most apparent form of patriarchal control, it was complemented by what Johan Galtung has referred to as ‘cultural violence’, legitimising and normalising discrimination against women, particularly in relation to religion and other cultural aspects of life. Such cultural violence is, as Fraser has suggested closely associated with androcentrism, institutionalising cultural values that devalue women or anything coded as ‘feminine’ (2007: 26). Of particular relevance for women in the plantation community were male biases that were present in religion, which had historically been used to legitimise ‘customs’ that idealised the obedient women. Hinduism, the main religion amongst the plantation community, included the belief that to be born a woman was a sign of a bad *karma* or the negative consequence of bad deeds in the past. Furthermore, every woman had to fulfil her *dharma* or duty, which was to be obedient to the male members of her family, including her father, husband and son and thereby hope for a better rebirth. However, women were also highly involved in religious activities, including the worship of powerful female deities, such as Kali, Saraswati and Lakshmi, as well as in organising festivals. Annual festivals were held on most tea estates in February and March to appease Mariyamman, when workers ‘seek to assuage the anger of Mariyamman’s malevolent side and attract her beneficence in the form of the protection and health of the community’ (Bass 2013: 120; Lawrence 2011). In the twenty-first century, these ideas were reinforced by the revival of religion, with priests from Jaffna and India being brought in for special festivals and *pujas*. Thus, while religion was viewed as an important source of solace and strength for women workers and participating in religious activities was noted

as a meritorious deed, it also endorsed the fatalistic belief that women's injustices stemmed from actions in the past, and were therefore deserved.

Amali Philips has argued that 'the pre-existing inequality between women and men was entwined into the culture and practices of the plantation community', adding to women's dependence (2003: 27).⁵ Her research indicated that women were 'treated much like children in need of paternal control and guidance, which comes from male supervisors at work, and male kin at home' (2003: 21).⁶ Such a comment resonated with the observation by the labour leader Menaha Kandasamy that while there were some instances of female kanganyes or supervisors, these women felt that they had to emulate their male counterparts and assumed authoritative attitudes, something that was highly resented by other women workers, who at the same time accepted this sort of behaviour from men (personal communication, 16 August 2013). These ideas were in line with information in the Demographic and Health Survey, which showed that the decision-making autonomy of plantation women workers in key areas was nearly half the levels of women in the rural and urban sectors (Department of Census and Statistics 2009: 192). In these ways, physical and cultural violence have had a pervasive influence on women's leadership in politics, encouraging women's internalisation of male superiority and acceptance of their dependence on and subordination to men.

Complementing these ideological influences was the structural nature of women's work, which involved both care responsibilities in the household as well as paid work on the plantations. At the most basic level, women's work remained under male control and authority and was undertaken throughout the day intermittently in the fields and in the household. The length of the combined working day was such that there was little time for leisure or politics. Women's work on the field entailed the most labour-intensive tasks such as the plucking of tea, which usually involved walking long distances to reach the place of work and repetitive work under the strict supervision of a (male) kangany or supervisor. In

⁵ While acknowledging that changes for empowerment need to arise from the women themselves and not by an 'external agency', Amali Philips correctly noted that many outsiders to a society fall into the fallacy of 'cultural relativism', namely that 'cultural beliefs and practices of others are beyond criticism and should not be questioned' (2003: 20–21).

⁶ Citing Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Philips adds that 'Work and home life, production and reproduction all take place under regimented conditions, ideally suited for the transformation of both men and women into "docile bodies".' (2003: 21).

addition to their work in the fields, women remained responsible for a range of household chores, including cooking, cleaning, fetching water, gathering firewood, caring for children and generally catering to the domestic needs of the family. These tasks kept them firmly within the boundaries of the estate itself and they were constantly involved in one task or the other in the fields or at home. For most, their daily lives began around 4 A.M. and ended around 11 P.M. Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that there was little time available for rest, leisure or political meetings, the latter usually taking place in the afternoons when the women were still at work or in the early evenings when they had to undertake household responsibilities.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

It is important to note that the low representation of women in the political hierarchy has been an all-Island feature, resulting from a combination of factors, including the pervasive nature of patriarchy in private and public spheres (UNDP Human Development Report 2012: 8). The 2009 UNDP report by Chulani Kodikara, on 'The Struggle for Equal Political Representation of Women in Sri Lanka' also called attention to the combination of social, cultural, psychological and economic factors that hindered the effective participation of women in politics and political institutions. It showed that obstacles existed at the personal level, at the level of political parties and at the electorate level where women were marginalised in favour of men with regard to nominations and choice of candidates. Women, who stood as independent candidates, were few in number and rarely successful. Such obstacles existed in spite of awareness raising work by women activists and committed organisations to improve the political participation of women.

Women workers on the plantations have historically had a high record of party membership and participation in strikes and other trade union action. Furthermore, most of them belonged to one union or the other and their membership dues were automatically deducted from their payroll, which meant that they paid for the privilege of belonging to a union. The unions were generally linked to political parties and the situation had been that the women voted for the candidates put forward by their parties. However, in spite of this participation in the political process, women were rarely included in the nomination lists. Rather than tackling the under-representation of women, unions were often in denial on this problem. Amali Philip has also pointed out that the activities of

Matha Sangams (the women's wings of the trade unions) were limited to traditional religious, cultural and ritual events (2003: 27).

There were, however, some women who have been able to make inroads in what was mainly a male hierarchy in trade unions. One of them was Betsy Selvaratnam née Mathews from Kerala, who worked for the Ceylon Workers' Congress for some thirty years since the 1970s. Based at the headquarters of the CWC in Colombo, she became the director in charge of the women's department and took up women's issues with the International Labour Federation, Public Services International (PSI) and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (a private German nonprofit organisation). Betsy worked on the problems of child labour and child abuse on the plantations. She also raised women's issues at the highest levels of the trade union hierarchy of the CWC.

Another landmark in women's political empowerment was the election of Anushiya Sivarajah of the CWC as Provincial Councillor from Nuwara Eliya district in the Central Provincial Council in 2004. Educated at the Good Shepherd's Convent in Kandy, she was the daughter of V. Annamalai, the former financial secretary of the CWC and a contemporary of S. Thondaman. She became the Minister of Industries, Sports, Women's Affairs, Estate Infrastructure, Rural Development, Hindu Cultural Affairs and Youth Affairs and Education (Tamil) in the Central Provincial Council and was the first woman minister from the plantation community. She has also took the cause of plantation women and represented the CWC in many international and national forums, and has had the distinction of being the only woman Vice President of the CWC. She did not, however, stand for the subsequent elections.

Other women leaders from the community have challenged patriarchal values at work and in the trade unions. Sarawathi Sivaguru from the National Workers' Union stood as a candidate in 2013 for the Provincial Council from the Nuwara Eliya district under the UPFA. During her election campaign in 2013 she paid specific attention to the lack of women's development in the plantations, emphasising the need to educate women from the estates who had migrated to work in the garments sector or as teachers and domestic aides, and who were 'facing many problems from general exploitation to sexual abuse' (*Sunday Times*, 8 September 2013). She highlighted the prevalence of underage pregnancies, sexual harassment, rape and other problems faced by women from the plantation community (*Ceylon Today*, 4 January 2014). She also participated in a meeting of the Central Provincial Council held in 2014 to develop a policy on the special needs of women.

Other women from the community have also entered politics, although the numbers are few. Notable in this respect was Merinal Rose of the CWC, who won a seat in the Pradeshiya Sabha (local unit of government) in 2002 and was its chairperson for a year. In 2010, M. Yogeswari was elected as a member of the Nuwara Eliya Pradeshiya Sabha. At the last election for parliament in 2010 Chandrasekaran's widow, Shanti, contested from Nuwara Eliya but lost. Another woman leader, Arulnayagi, was a women's coordinator in the CWC and rose from the position of trade union office clerk to a trade union representative and became an elected member of the Ambagamuwa Pradeshiya Sabha.

Another woman leader from the plantation community was Menaha Kandasamy, daughter of A. K. Kandasamy, a former plantation trade union leader. She became the first woman to lead a plantation trade union in the country, namely, the Ceylon Plantation Workers' (Red Flag) Union. She graduated in economics from the University of Jaffna and received her master's degree in gender and women's studies from the University of Bradford in the United Kingdom. Her work involved teaching estate women workers about their basic rights, leadership skills, women's oppression, especially domestic violence, arguing that this violence combined with their poverty has been a setback for plantation women in politics. She founded the Red Flag Women's Movement (RFBM) as part of the main trade union in order to address the themes of domestic violence and the need for women's leadership. She has highlighted the patriarchal culture of trade unions on the plantation, viewing unions as 'inward looking and male oriented', with women's leadership being a 'non issue' to the unions (2002: 37). According to her, women were 'active members and "nominal" leaders', and had 'value only so far as it suited the male agenda of the trade unions' (Kandasamy 2002: 51). They were also hardly visible in the leadership of the unions. There was just one woman representative out of twenty-one members of the executive committee of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, five women out of forty-two members in the National Union of Workers, no female representative in the six-member Executive Committee of the Plantation Workers' Front and just three women out of fifteen members in the executive committee of the Lanka Jathika Estate Union Workers Union (Kandasamy 2002: 56, Table 6).

Part of the problem stemmed from attitudes of men towards women leadership although women were 'confident' that they could become leaders if given the 'necessary training, exposure and experience' (Kandasamy 2002: 61). She proposed that trade unions should have specific strategies to increase numbers of women in their organisational

hierarchy, train women about their rights and bring together women from different trade unions to discuss women's issues and increase women's solidarity (Kandasamy, personal communication, 15 March 2012). The RFWM brought out several studies and pamphlets including 'Women's Leadership. Poverty, Violence Against Women and Women's Leadership in Tea Plantation Trade Unions in Sri Lanka' (Red Flag Women's Movement [RFWM], Kandy 2012) and 'Can we be democratic without women's leadership?' (RFWM, Asian Regional Conference, Kandy 2012). Another pamphlet on plantation women as domestic workers was titled 'Space to Speak—Study on Domestic Workers' (RFWM, Kandy 2007).

In their own way, these women have challenged conventional views on the role of women in politics. Their experience shows that the political empowerment of plantation women involves addressing, class, caste and gender hierarchies not just in trade unions and political parties, but also at the level of households, the community, and the wider society. Progress in politics also implies that women have to often defy the structural, cultural and physical violence that has characterised their lives over centuries.

Overall, however, the wide spectrum of patriarchal controls on the lives of women plantation workers, as well as severe deficits in terms of basic capabilities of health and income, education continue to erode the potential of women workers to effectively participate in politics. This is a serious democratic deficit that needs to be challenged as it prevents women from exercising their basic human rights as individuals and citizens of the country. It would appear that patriarchy remains a pervasive legacy of the 'Planter Raj'. There is growing recognition that these significant democratic deficits can be reversed only by a broad-based agenda of increased focus on women workers' and through political mobilisation simultaneously on different fronts. The emergence of young women leaders in plantation trade unions is a hopeful sign for the future.

Although plantation workers constituted the largest working-class group in the Sri Lanka, it took nearly 100 years before trade unions developed on the estates and yet another half century before the workers were granted their basic labour, citizenship and democratic rights. But these deficits in entitlements did not mean that the workers were submissive and accepted their situation meekly. On the contrary, and as demonstrated in this book, they confronted the power of the authorities in a variety of ways. The history of plantation workers' protests against their exploitation is replete with acts of courage and daring by both individuals and groups in response to the tactics and strategies evolved by the planters and the management, who, with the support of the state, persevered to retain them as a cheap and 'captive labour force.'

In the process, the plantation workers, their organisations and representatives developed strategic alliances with political parties, civil society organisations and social movements, and undertook strike action and campaigns against the planting 'establishment' and the Sri Lankan state. Concerned outsiders were important catalysts in changing some of the oppressive laws governing plantation workers and highlighting deprivation in the social and welfare conditions of the workers. However, it was ultimately the strength and organisational capabilities of the workers and their leadership that won significant social, economic and political entitlements for the plantation community. It was a 'long march' for the women and men on the plantations, during which they and their unions and political parties had to deal not only with class-based demands regarding their social, welfare and labour rights, but also the fundamental insecurities associated with disenfranchisement, statelessness and ethnic conflict.

MULTIPLE MODES OF COERCION AND RESISTANCE

A core reason for these deficits lay with labour controls on plantations. Plantation production in the world was, by origin and nature, a ruthless and highly exploitative form of production. Historically based on the large-scale cultivation of tropical crops with the use of resident slave labour, it was structured along hierarchical principles based on class, gender, race and colour in the organisation of work, where harsh discipline and even violence were used to control the alien and 'captive' labour. The planter was the patriarch whose authority was unquestioned within the 'realm' of the plantations, and who had no compunction in using physical violence and harsh punishments to enforce his orders. Given the profitability of this model of production, many of the features of the early plantations were continued even after slavery was abolished.

The use of extra-economic forms of coercion was accepted, and even justified, as a means of controlling the plantation workforce in Sri Lanka. While not widely acknowledged in the research on plantations in Sri Lanka, slavery and bonded labour were existent in the early nineteenth century in the country, and those in authority were familiar with, and in most instances accepted and even condoned such practices. Thus, the fact that slave-like conditions existed on the plantations was not necessarily viewed as an alien feature of labour relations. Several planters with experience of slave plantations had migrated to Ceylon and were aware of such methods of labour control. Furthermore, even some of the governors in this early period, who had entered plantation production, were clearly keen to control the workers and had condoned slave-like control over the workers in order to increase production and lower costs. Thus, while *laissez-faire* capitalism in Sri Lanka was actively promoted by the colonial government from the 1830s, it focused on providing financial incentives to the planters, resulting in the retention rather than the removal of semi-feudal and slave-like labour relations on the plantations.

Such practices were complemented by local forms of oppression based on caste, which was brought across through the system of recruitment of workers for plantations. The planters used *kanganies* or local recruiters provided advances to workers from the most famine-prone and deprived sections in the Tamil districts of the Madras Presidency in south India, to work on the Ceylon plantations. These workers belonged to the relatively 'lower castes' in south India, and caste control was consciously nurtured by the *kanganies* (who came from a relatively higher caste) and the planters in the division of work, in the supervisory process

and in the workers' places of residence as well as in their religious and community life on the estates. These local hierarchies created cleavages amongst the workers themselves, and hindered them from forming a collective group to challenge the authorities. Thus, what evolved on the Sri Lankan plantations under colonialism was a combination of slave and local forms of coercion to control the workforce, dividing it along caste hierarchies and giving rise to an extremely oppressive and powerful form of labour exploitation.

In spite of the comprehensive controls, the workers displayed ingenuity and courage in resisting the authority of the planters and the management. Prior to the formation of trade unions, workers on the plantations used a variety of means, including absenteeism, theft, 'insolence', stealing the produce and 'bolting' the estate, even if they were aware of the harsh punishments they would face if caught deserting. Religious and cultural activities, including songs and dances, were used to highlight the harshness of life on the estates. Such performances could not be forbidden by the planters who were keen to placate the workers because of their numbers. In a similar way, the planters encouraged liquor as a means of allowing the workers to forget their miserable conditions of life, but excessive drinking also resulted in riots and violence, acts that served to slow down work. What these protests signified was both agency and strategy on the part of the workers, who recognising their constraints, were nevertheless conscious of their exploitation and were intent and capable of using available means to challenge the authorities.

It is a testimony to the structural incorporation of these forms of exploitation on plantations that many of them remained even after the country gained Independence in 1948. Up to the twenty-first century, the estate continued to remain the space within which most workers were born, lived, worked and died. Workers were still highly dependent on the estate for their income, health facilities, primary education, crèches and housing. In most cases, retired workers lived on the estates and when they died, were buried within its boundaries. In addition, most of their cultural activities, including religious and other festivals were conducted within the estate. In effect, the plantation functioned as the only 'homeland' for the workers even if they had little right or say over its governance. This 'womb to tomb' existence for many workers meant that even if they were no longer constrained by guards and laws from moving out of the estate, they continued to remain within its boundaries and controls. Through lacking sufficient opportunities, capabilities and security, the majority continued to be restrained within the 'Planter Raj', in an ideological context that continued to endorse

management superiority, inferiority of workers and a controlled living and working space.

OUTSIDERS AS CATALYSTS OF CHANGE

The book has demonstrated the vital role of concerned outsiders in bringing about progressive legislation and social changes as well stimulating and supporting labour struggles on the plantations. The earliest changes in the social conditions on the plantations were brought by concerned British and Ceylonese who were influenced by the spread of liberal ideas in the nineteenth century which supported human and democratic ideas and extended these beliefs in the colonies. These outsiders included radical members in the House of Commons in Britain, British professionals and bureaucrats in the colonies and local reformers who, having protested against slavery, were opposed also to the slave-like conditions on the Ceylon plantations. They highlighted the inhuman conditions and the high degree of indebtedness of the workers, the social costs of poor educational and medical facilities on the estates, the high mortality rates amongst plantation workers as well as the prevalence of child labour. Prominent political figures from Sri Lanka, such as Muttu Coomaraswamy and his nephews Ramanathan and Arunachalam spoke against the plight of 'our countrymen' and H. J. C Pereira attacked the prevailing Labour Ordinance as 'refined slavery'. While these persons did not condemn the fundamental features of the plantation system and not all their recommendations were fully accepted by the authorities, they were important catalysts in changing some legislation and improving the social conditions of the workers.

Outsiders with a more radical agenda were directly involved in developing political consciousness amongst the plantation workers in Ceylon under colonialism. Important in this respect were several Indians, who participated in the nationalist movement against British colonialism, and who took up the case of the rights of the plantation workers. D. M. Manilal and his wife Jayunkvar sharply criticised the problems faced by the plantations workers in Ceylon, and linked up with Indian and local radicals during their stay in the country. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were famous Indian leaders who addressed the plantation workers in the 1920s and 1930s, giving them a sense of belonging to the nationalist struggles, while the growing anti-Brahmin movement led by Periyar in south India brought about increased awareness of caste oppression.

The 1920s was also a period of extensive labour union activity in Britain and in Ceylon, and influenced the labour relations and the labour movement on the plantations. A member of the British Trade Union Congress, A. A. Purcell, visited the Ceylon at the invitation of the urban Ceylon Labour Union leader A. E. Goonesinha, and promised TUC support to the local labour movement. An active member of the urban Ceylon Labour Union and a close associate of A. E. Goonesinha was the south Indian journalist Natesa Aiyar, who wrote extensively and in detail on the oppression of the 'Planter Raj'. He was elected to the Ceylon Legislative Council in 1924 as one of the Indian representatives, and he used this platform to highlight the dismal conditions of the plantation workers. It was Natesa Aiyar's initiative that led to the formation of the first trade union in 1931 on the plantations, taking up a variety of issues, including the level of wages, the conditions of work and the unscrupulous role of the kanganies in exploiting the workers. But the increased awareness amongst workers that led to their collective mobilisation was also the outcome of the educational reforms of 1920 that resulted in more children attending schools, who were able to question what they viewed as unjust practices in labour relations.

In the 1930s, the Left Party, the LSSP, was able to make inroads into the plantation sector, with the British radical M. A. Bracegirdle appearing at their meetings and gaining support among the workers. This led to the eventual development of joint strikes and militant action hitting at the heart of the British colonialism through opposing both the Planter Raj and the British Raj. Militant strikes took place on the plantations under the leadership of the LSSP-led union. Under these pressures, the Labour Department intervened and in 1940 enforced a Seven-Point Agreement between the planters and the unions, the second Collective Agreement in the history of the labour movement in the country. After Independence in 1948, many outsiders supported the struggles of the plantation workers. But a qualitative change came about with the rise of ethnic chauvinism, a feature that had emerged during discussions on franchise in the 1920s and which became more extreme and populist in the 1950s.

TRADE UNIONS, ETHNICITY AND THE DEMOCRATIC AGENDA

The development of trade unionism in the 1920s and 1930s took place at the same time as the deliberations on franchise in the country. The spread of democratic ideas informed the political discourse in Britain and in Ceylon by the 1920s, giving increasing attention to the possibilities

of franchise and citizenship. But such opportunities for participation in the government also posed a threat to many local politicians and groups, who were concerned with the electoral strength of the plantation workers. Similar to many plantation economies, which had a mixed ethnic composition, such as Malaysia, Guyana, Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago, the advent of Independence also brought other divisions such as those based on class, race and ethnicity into the political arena.

There was a great deal of controversy about giving the plantation workers in Ceylon the right to vote. Campaigns were raised by some Sinhala nationalist politicians that their own interests would be subsumed by those of the Tamil plantation workers. Further allegations included that the plantation workers were 'subservient' and 'ignorant'. Nevertheless, the colonial government allowed all adult persons with a five-year residence in the country to participate in the national elections. But the very 'success' of their participation and their influence in the national elections in 1931 and 1936 where the plantation workers were able to elect their representatives led to increased dismay and anxiety amongst the Sinhala politicians particularly those who resided in the Kandyan region which was the heart of plantation production. In retaliation, the Village Committees Ordinance was passed in 1937, which denied plantation workers the right to vote in the local unit of government. The ensuing protests by the plantation workers, the Indian community, the Indian government, and their allies in the left parties, raised both class and ethnic tensions, with the unrest spreading to the urban regions, resulting in hostility towards all Indian labour in the country.

In response, and with the support of the plantation unions, the Indian government banned the emigration of workers to Ceylon in 1939. From the start, therefore, claiming democratic rights for the plantation workers involved confronting established class and ethnic power relations in society. The Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC), an amalgamation of sixteen Colombo associations of Indians, was set up after Nehru's visit to Ceylon in 1939. It also created its own labour union, the Ceylon Indian Congress Labour Union, which later took on the name the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC). The most important leader of the CWC was S. Thondaman, a Gandhian, whose commitment to nonviolence led to the adoption of more conciliatory attitudes towards the management.

The most visible manifestation of class-based discrimination against the plantation workers was the passing of the Citizenship and Franchise Acts shortly after the country gained Independence in 1948, which rendered the vast majority of them 'stateless' and unable to participate in the electoral process. The Acts were no doubt influenced

by the electoral strength of the plantation votes that had brought both plantation representatives as well as some Left candidates to parliament in the elections of 1947. While there were protests by the plantation trade unions and parties, as well as the Left in parliament, the Tamil and Sinhala bourgeoisie in parliament were able to jointly gather sufficient votes to pass the necessary legislation to remove the political power of the plantation workers.

Many developing countries, which did not have a strong capitalist class to guide the industrialisation process after colonialism, witnessed the revival of divisions, other than class, in national politics. Religion and language were used by some Sinhalese leaders to foster anti-Tamil sentiments and stimulate Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, and they were able to exploit the insecurities of widespread unemployment in the early 1950s to gain support for discriminatory policies, such as the 'Sinhala Only' Act of 1956. By the 1970s the Tamils had come together on a platform, the TULF, with the moderate groups asking for greater autonomy under a federal structure while the more radical groups demanded a separate state.

Although they were Tamil-speaking, the plantation workers had little to do with the wider ethnic tensions in the country, as their primary focus was on solving the problem of citizenship and political exclusion. These demands were, however, enmeshed in the ethnic politics of the period. The plantation workers and their leadership were essentially 'voiceless' in the two Citizenship Agreements of 1964 and 1974 between the Sri Lankan and Indian governments. It also was unfortunate that their Left allies also succumbed to chauvinism and populist tactics in politics, using the ethnic card as a means of securing votes and seats in parliament. The only prospect to intervene in national politics was to go beyond class-based struggles and align and negotiate with existing political parties for the labour and democratic rights of the plantation workers. Coalition politics also brought to the surface ideological differences within the CWC, leading to its breakup in the 1950s, and the formation of other more Left-oriented unions, such as the Democratic Workers' Congress under the leadership of A. Aziz. S. Thondaman continued to be the leader of the CWC.

But class alliances had become subsumed under ethnic discrimination in national politics affecting the plantation workers in different ways. While the SLFP-led government, which included LSSP leaders and A. Aziz, undertook the nationalisation of plantations under the Land Reform Laws of 1972 and 1975, this 'progressive' step gave priority to appeasing the rural Sinhalese who had been affected by unemployment.

The net effect for the plantation workers was worsening labour relations, widespread poverty and starvation as the government restricted rationing of rice and flour, food prices increased, and the process was accompanied by employment insecurity as employment was given to the Sinhalese.

To counter these moves, the CWC, under Thondaman's leadership, linked up with the other rival political party, the UNP. The latter, while opting for more a capitalist development path, recognised the importance of maintaining calm in a sector that contributed significantly to the exchequer, as well as capturing the votes of the plantation workers, many of whom had over time become citizens of the country. After the UNP victory in the parliamentary elections in 1977, Thondaman became a cabinet minister, as well as remaining an important negotiator in the ethnic tensions, keeping his links with the moderate Tamil grouping, the TULF. He used his bargaining power with the government to gain important concessions for the plantation community. He also used his international links to ask donors to improve the social conditions on the plantations, and played an important role in also supporting the rights of women workers. But his role as cabinet minister was somewhat at odds with the government, as the ethnic tensions developed into a civil war, and the plantation workers were also targeted in the anti-Tamil violence that swept the country and sparked off widespread killings in 1977, 1981 and 1983.

The economic deprivation as well as the ethnic conflict resulted in greater militancy amongst the plantation workers, particularly amongst the youth, who rebelled against the more traditional leadership of compromise and co-option. In 1984, fifteen unions representing the vast majority of plantation workers and crossing political barriers, under the leadership of the CWC, went on a nine day strike and gained major increases in wages as well as equal wages for women and men. The strike demonstrated the vulnerability of the state to the organised power of the plantation workers, including the extensive financial losses that occurred in this period. It also gave the workers greater awareness of their collective strength and confidence in taking industrial action to get better conditions of work and pay. It spurred them to take action to resolve the 'statelessness' problem, and in 1986, a prayer campaign was successfully launched by the CWC under Thondaman's leadership to end this issue. It had barely begun before the government, recognising the power of the workers, agreed to grant Sri Lankan citizenship to all the 'stateless'.

Most trade union movements in the world have faced the issue of unionism versus radical/socialist politics. Unionism is often seen as following narrow non-political concerns with mainly economic benefits, whereas radical politics is associated with a wider political

commitment to change society. This was the case with the plantation unions in Sri Lanka, which had from the beginning, been involved with political issues. Those leaders and others in the CWC who were more left-oriented such as Abdul Aziz and P. Chandrasekaran resigned from CWC to form their own unions. There is little doubt that S. Thondaman was a trade union leader par excellence working for the benefit of his constituency of plantation workers, and especially concerned with wage rises and conditions of work, education, housing and democratic rights. He intervened in coalition politics in a pragmatic manner to promote policies supporting the plantation community. He was not linked to class struggle and revolutionary politics in order to overthrow governments. While the leadership of the CWC chose to negotiate for their rights with those in power, it was not surprising that a significant section of workers, and particularly the youth, became disillusioned with the limited gains achieved. In time, other charismatic and radical leaders appeared in plantation politics, challenging traditional trade union and party hierarchies. Ultimately, however, it was the strategic and widespread collective action of the workers and their unions that forced the government to give in to their economic and political demands.

RESHAPING ETHNICITY AND DEEPENING DEMOCRACY

The ethnic conflict in the country, having exposed the plantation workers to anti-Tamil violence, also led to political awareness, particularly among the youth, that they constituted a distinct geographically-based ethnic group in the country. The formation of the Up-Country People's Front in 1989 under the leadership of P. Chandrasekaran expressed this perspective more clearly by taking up the issue of devolution in its political agenda and moving away from the traditional identification of plantation workers as 'Indian Tamils' or 'Persons of Recent Indian Origin' gave them a geographical identity within Ceylon itself. The plantations become places of 'protection', where they were entitled to living quarters. Such perceptions were, no doubt, influenced by the extreme insecurity experienced by the community since 1977 and 1983 when they were targets of Tamil-Sinhala conflict in the country. During this time, they were able to develop community-based methods to counter these attacks, stimulating the notion that the estate was a place of relative security for them. Within the boundaries of the estate were persons and households that were familiar to one another, and who came together to safeguard property and lives from attacks from outside the estate.

In a similar vein, increasing numbers of workers who acquired full citizenship qualifications also began to redefine the social and economic role of plantations as more than simply *thottams* or 'tea gardens'. As citizens, they were keen to access land and other rights, and were keen to exercise this right as they were entitled to accommodation on the plantations, a right that was rarely revoked even after workers' retirement. The levels of income and resources of most of the community were, however, so low that they could not afford to buy their own land outside the estate but could assert their rights over the dwellings on the estate. Increasingly, the youth and others who left the estates for work often returned to their *uur* (home) for special cultural and religious functions, strengthening not only their links with the estate community, but also reinforcing the notion that the plantation region was, in effect, their territory of origin on the basis of which they could demand social justice, citizenship and human development.

Accompanying these processes was the broadening of the base of the plantation workers' struggles. Devolution had given space for different modalities of strategies, resulting in challenging the hegemony of the CWC, a process that being even more structural and widespread when Thondaman died in 1999 and his grandson took over the leadership of the union. At the same time, the plantation community's struggles for their rights were broadened through the involvement of NGOs and other civil society organisations. The latter highlighted the serious deficits that existed in the community with regard to basic capabilities and entitlements. But more significantly these institutions and their members have been directly working with and empowering the members of the community. They brought in a rights-based approach to basic entitlements such as education, health and gender equality. They provided spaces for deliberation, often taking plantation workers' concerns to the national and international levels. They have focused also on the more recent and urgent needs of the community, including promoting dialogue and understanding between the different groups in the country and discussing ways of increasing the political representation of the community at different levels of government. In the process, a degree of self-criticism has also emerged with issues such as caste-based exclusion being condemned by writers from the community itself. We have argued that such initiatives have challenged the traditional hierarchies and resulted in a process of deepening democracy.

There is no doubt that the protests and collective actions of the workers and their organisations, as well supporting organisations and movements have succeeded in overcoming some of the most oppressive

features of the nineteenth-century Planter Raj. Nevertheless there is still a long way to go before plantation workers are treated on par with other groups in the country. Even after formal citizenship has been granted to the workers, the community experience, discrimination in terms of entitlements and rights and have the lowest scores in basic capabilities in the country.

Many young persons, including women, have left the estates to seek employment in other sectors. While a majority have sought work in the urban centres of Sri Lanka, some—mainly women—have also gone abroad as unskilled domestic workers in the Middle East, sending remittances back to their families. There are increasing numbers of young people from plantations who worked as domestic labour in other parts of the island. While these forms of work might result in increased household income, in reality, the workers, by and large, have continued to perform menial unskilled jobs. Thus, labour mobility for the plantation community has not always meant an improvement in the conditions of work, but rather a horizontal shift in the form of exploitation.

PERSISTENCE OF PATRIARCHY IN POLITICS

We have argued that patriarchal ideologies and practices were entrenched in the labour regime and the life on the plantations from its origins in the early nineteenth century. The women workers were subjected to 'multiple patriarchies' on the plantations, embedded in class, caste and even citizenship, normalising and justifying women's subordinate status in society. The planters, the state, the unions and the plantation community upheld these ideologies resulting in disadvantages for women in terms of basic capabilities such as wages, education and health. The voices that criticised women's exploitation also came from outsiders and it was in the UN Decade of Women (1975–85) that the issue of equal wages on the plantations for women and men was highlighted as an injustice. This continued to be the case till 1984. The twenty-first century has seen improvements in women's education, and to some extent, also progress in income and health. But their achievements fall well below those of their counterparts in the other sectors.

In spite of progress on several fronts, a glaring deficit evident even in the second decade of the twenty-first century is the low representation of plantation women workers in the leadership of trade unions and political parties. Neither the trade unions nor the political parties representing the interests of the plantation community have prioritised the problems

stemming from alcoholism, domestic violence and caste discrimination, which have often negatively affected women. Some of the emerging women leaders on the plantations have taken up these concerns, insisting that the state, management and unions have a duty to ensure, through adequate legislation, the basic rights of women to security, equal political representation and freedom from patriarchal oppression.

POWER AND PROTEST IN THE 'PLANTER RAJ'

This book has demonstrated that the labour movements need to take on board claims and rights that recognise the diversity of oppressions experienced by their membership. While the traditional focus of trade unions has been to negotiate with employers for better wages and conditions of work, there is increasing awareness that many marginalised workers in the world experienced not only economic exploitation but also social, ethnic and gender discrimination as well as political exclusion. Under these circumstances it was necessary to devise different strategies and undertake diverse actions to counter these multiple forms of oppression. In doing so, trade unions need labour and democratic rights but also to ally and negotiate not only to uphold with supportive groups, movements and political parties to achieve these goals.

The 'Long March' of the plantation workers in Sri Lanka has not ended. Although much has been achieved in terms of democratic rights, some of the historic features of economic exploitation, social oppression and gender discrimination remain. The legacy of the 'Planter Raj' is enduring in spite of workers having fought long and bitter battles to overcome the worst aspects of slavery, feudalism and capitalism.

Bibliography

- Abeynaike, T. H. B. W., *Ceylon Daily News Eighth Parliament of Sri Lanka* 1977. Colombo: Lake House, 1993.
- Agarwal, Bina, and Pradeep Panda, 'Toward Freedom from Domestic Violence: The Neglected Obvious', *Journal of Human Development*, 8(3), 2007: 359–88.
- Aiyar, K. Natesa, *Under Planter Raj: The Standard Wage in Ceylon*. N.P. (no publisher), 1925.
- Ali, Ameer, 'Peasant Agriculture in Ceylon 1833–1893'. M.Phil. thesis, London School of Economics, 1970.
- , 'Rice and Irrigation in 19th-Century Sri Lanka', *The Ceylon Historical Journal* 25 (1–4), 1978.
- Allen, Richard B., 'Satisfying the "Want for Labouring People": European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850'. *Journal of World History* 21 (1), 2010: 45–73.
- Alles, A. C., 'The Pope Murder Case', *Famous Criminal Trials of Sri Lanka*, vol. 1, Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries, 1977.
- Altbach, Hishino (ed.), *From Feminism to Liberation* (revised), Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman, 2009.
- Amarasinghe, Y. R., *Revolutionary Idealism and Parliamentary Politics: A Study of Trotskyism in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2000 (1998).
- Andradi, W. M. D. D., *Sri Lanka Subordinates of the British—English-educated Ceylonese in Official Life*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2011.
- Anon., *Slavery and The Slave Trade in British India: with notices of the existence of these evils in the islands of Ceylon, Malacca, and Penang, drawn from official documents*, London: Thomas Ward and Co., 1841. Available at <https://archive.org/details/slaveryslavetrade00lond> (accessed 17 November 2014).
- , 'National Elections', *Economic Review*, December 1982.
- , 'Presidential Elections, 19.12.1988.' Available at <http://www.slections.gov.lk/pdf/1988%20Presidential.pdf> (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Arunachalam, K., *Malaiyakath Tamil Navalkal Oor Arimugam*, N.P., 1999.

- Arunachalam, Ponnambalam, *Speeches and Writings of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam*, Colombo: H. W. Cave & Co., 1936.
- Arunachalam, Ponnambalam and Edward Carpenter, *Light from the East*, London: George, Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1927.
- Asian Development Bank, *Completion Report Sri Lanka: Plantation Development Project*, no. 34023, December 2010.
- Aziz, Abdul, *75th Birthday Felicitation Volume*, Colombo: Felicitation Committee, 1986.
- Bagchi, Amiya Kumar, *Capital and Labour Redefined: India and the Third World*, London: Anthem Press, 2002.
- Balasunderam, S. C., A. S. Chandrabose and P. P. Sivapragasam, 'Caste Discrimination among Indian Tamil Plantations Workers in Sri Lanka' in K. T. Silva, P. P. Sivapragasam and P. Thanges (eds), *Caste or Caste-blind? Dynamics of Concealed Caste Discrimination, Social Exclusion and Protest in Sri Lanka*, Copenhagen: International Dalit Solidarity Network; New Delhi: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies; and Colombo and Chennai: Kumaran Book House, 2009.
- Barcia Paz, Manuel, *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808–1848*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.
- Barret, Michele and Mary McIntosh, 'The "Family Wage": Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists', *Capital and Class* 11, 1980: 51–72.
- Bass, Daniel, 'Malaiyaha (Up-country) Tamil Identity and Politics in the Twenty-first Century', Address at International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 30 October 2000. Colombo: Kumaran Book House, 2000. Available at <http://noolaham.net/project/35/3492/3492.pdf> (accessed 13 November 2014).
- , *Everyday Ethnicity in Sri Lanka: Up-country Tamil Identity Politics*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Bastiampillai, B. E. S. J., 'The South Indian Immigrant's Trek to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Science* 7 (1&2), 1984: 41–66.
- Beckford, G. L., *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1972.
- , *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*, London: Zed Press, 1983.
- Beechey, V., 'On Patriarchy', *Feminist Review* 3, 1979: 66–82.
- Behal, R. P., 'The Emergence of a Plantation Economy: Assam Tea Industry in the Nineteenth Century', *Occasional Papers on History and Society*, 1985, New Delhi.
- , *One Hundred Years of Servitude: The Political Economy of Tea Plantations in Colonial Assam*, New Delhi: Tulika Books, forthcoming.
- Behal, R. P., and Prabhu P. Mohapatra, 'Tea and Money versus Human Life: The Rise and Fall of the Indenture System in the Assam Tea Plantations 1840–1908' in E. Valentine Daniel, Henry Bernstein and Tom Brass (eds), *Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Asia*, London: Frank Cass, 1992.

- bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, New York and London: Routledge, 2004.
- Bertolacci, Anthony, *A View of the Agricultural, Commercial and Financial Interests of Ceylon*, London: Black, Parbury and Allen, 1817.
- Bhasin, Kamla, *What Is Patriarchy?* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993.
- Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi, 'Paradigms in the Historical Approach to Labour Studies on South Asia' in Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labour History: State of the Art*, Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2006: 147–60.
- Biyanwila, Janaka, *The Labour Movement in the Global South: Trade Unions in Sri Lanka*, Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Blassingame, John W., *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Bose, Sugata, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of the Global Empire*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Masculine Domination*. California: Stanford University Press and Polity Press, 2001.
- Boyd, W., *Autobiography of a Periya Dorai*, Colombo: A & J Ferguson, 1889.
- Brass, Tom, and Henry Bernstein, 'Introduction: Proletarianisation and Deproletarianisation on the Colonial Plantations', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 19, 1992: 1–40.
- Breman, Jan, 'Labour Migration and Rural Transformation in Colonial Asia', Mimeo, The Hague, 1987.
- , *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- British Anti-Slavery Society, *Emigration from India: the Export of Coolies, and Other Labourers, to Mauritius*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Camp, Stephanie M. H., "I could not stay there", Enslaved Women, Truancy and the Geography of Everyday Forum of Resistance in the Antebellum Plantation South', *Slavery and Abolition* 23 (3), 2002: 1–20.
- Campbell, Gwyn, 'Slavery and the Trans-Indian Ocean World Slave Trade: A Historical Outline' in Himanshu Prabha Ray and Edward A. Alpers (eds), *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007: 286–305.
- Caspersz, Paul, 'Satyodaya, NGOs and Civil Society: Mobilizing across Class and Community in a Globalizing Economy' in S. H. Hasbullah and Barrie M. Morrison (eds), *Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalization: Struggling to Create a New Social Order*, New Delhi, California and London: Sage Publications, 2004: 196–220.
- Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), 'Moving out of Poverty in the Estate Sector in Sri Lanka: Understanding Growth and Freedom from the Bottom up'. Study for the World Bank, Colombo, 2005.
- , 'Poverty head count ratio—Sri Lanka', n.d. Available at <http://www.cepa.lk/index.php/en/poverty-head-count-ratio-sri-lanka> (accessed 17 November 2014).

- Ceylon Workers' Congress, 'Statement adopted by the Joint Meeting of the National Council and the Executive Council of the Ceylon Workers Congress held on 24th and 25th September 1977', Colombo, 1977.
- , *Report of Activities 1971–81*, Colombo, 1982.
- Chakravarti, Uma, *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens*, Calcutta: STREE (imprint of Bhatkal and Sen), 2003.
- Chandrabose, A. S., 'Why plantation worker daily wages should be raised from Rs. 285 to Rs. 500', *Transcurrents*, 17 May 2011. Available at <http://transcurrents.com/news-views/archives/578> (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Chhachhi, Amrita, 'Interview with Nancy Fraser', *Development and Change* 42, 2011: 297–314.
- Chitraleka, M. (also known as Chitraleka Maunaguru), 'The Place of Meenadchy Ammal in the History of Sri Lankan Women', *The Thatched Patio*, May/June 1991: 67–72.
- Collective for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Sri Lanka, *Civil Society Report on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 2010. Available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/ngos/IMADR_CESCR45_SriLanka.pdf (accessed 9 December 2014).
- Collins, Patricia Hill, 'Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought', *Social Problems* 33 (6), 1986, Special Theory Issue, October–December: S14–S32 (University of California Press, on behalf of the Society for the Study of Social Problems).
- Colombo University Community Extension Centre, *Women's Reproductive Issues: Estate Sector in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: University of Colombo, 2008.
- Connell, R. W., 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender & Society* 19 (6), 2005: 829–59.
- Corea, Gamini, *The Instability of an Export Economy*, Colombo: Marga Institute, 1975.
- Craton, Michael, *Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977.
- , 'A Cresting Wave? Recent Trends in the Historiography of Slavery, with Special Reference to the British Caribbean', *Collected Seminar Papers* 34 (2), 1985, Caribbean Societies, University of London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies.
- Curtin, Philip, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 (1990).
- Daniel, E. Valentine, Henry Bernstein and Tom Brass (eds), *Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Asia*, London: Frank Cass, 1992.
- Daniel, Valentine, '"Tea Talk": Violent Measures in the Discursive Practices of Sri Lanka's Estate Tamils', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3, 1993.
- Davis, K., *The Population of India and Pakistan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.
- de A. Samarasinghe, S. W. R., 'Sri Lanka's Presidential Elections', *Economic and Political Weekly* 24 (3), 21 January 1989: 131–35.

- de Alwis, Malathi, and Kumari Jayawardena, *Casting Pearls: The Women's Franchise Movement in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2001.
- De Haan, Arjan, and Samita Sen, 'Working Class Struggles, Labour Elites and Closed Shops: The Lessons from India's Trade Unions and Experiences of Organisation', Paper for SEWA/Cornell/WIEGO Conference, Membership-based Organizations of the Poor, Ahmedabad, January 2005. Available at http://www.sacw.net/Labour/de_Haan_Jan2005.pdf (accessed 17 November 2014).
- de Silva, K. M. (ed.), *Letters on Ceylon 1846–50: The Administration of Viscount Torrington and the Rebellion of 1848*, Kandy: K.G.V. and Sons, 1965.
- , *A History of Sri Lanka*, London: C. Hurst and Co.: Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981.
- de Silva, Minnette, *The Life and Work of an Asian Woman Architect*, Colombo: Minnette de Silva Pvt. Ltd., 1998.
- de Silva, R. K., *Early Prints of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 1800–1900*, London: Serendib Publications, 1985.
- , *19th Century Newspaper Engravings of Ceylon/Sri Lanka*, London: Serendib Publications, 1998.
- de Silva, R. K., and Kumari Jayawardena, *Pictorial Impressions of Early Colonial Sri Lanka: People's Customs and Occupations*, London: Serendib Publications, 2014.
- de Silva, S. B. D., *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.
- Denham, E. B., *Ceylon at the Census of 1911: Being the Review of the Results of the Census of 1911*, Colombo: Government Press, 2012.
- Dep, A. C., *History of the Ceylon Police Vol. 2, 1866–1913*. Sri Lanka: N.P., 1969.
- , *A History of the Ceylon Police* (first edition, G. K. Pippet, 1938), Sri Lanka: N.P., 1985 (1982).
- Devaraj, P. P., *Constitutional Electoral Reform Proposals and Indian Origin Tamils*, Colombo: Foundation for Community Transformation, 2008.
- , 'Chasing a Crooked Shadow—Quest for Fundamental Rights in Sri Lanka', note written on the occasion of the 66th anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence, 4 February 2014. Provided to the authors by P. P. Devaraj on 11 March 2014.
- DeVotta, Neil, 'Illiberalism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka', *Journal of Democracy* 13 (1), 2002: 84–98.
- , *Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- , 'From Exclusion to Incorporation: Tangled and Tortuous Experience of the IOT Tamils' in Gnana Moonesinghe (ed.), *Nation Building—Priorities for Sustainability and Inclusivity*, Colombo: Shramaya Publications, 2010.
- Dunham, David, 'Land, Plantations and Peasants in Sri Lanka Development—the Period Prior to 1990', unpublished paper, ISS, The Hague, 1980.
- Durant, T. J., 'The Slave Plantation Revisited: A Sociological Perspective' in T. J. Durant and David J. D. Knottnerus (eds), *Plantation Society and Race*

- Relations: The Origins of Inequality*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999: 3–16.
- Durant, T. J., and David J. D. Knottnerus (eds.), *Plantation Society and Race Relations: The Origins of Inequality*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999.
- Duncan, James S., *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race and Biopower in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*, Aldershot, Hampshire, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2007.
- East India Company, *Slave Trade (East India) Slavery in Ceylon: Copies or Abstracts of all correspondence between the directors of the East India Company and the Company's government in India since the 1st day of June 1827, on the subject of slavery in the territories under the Company's rule, Session 15 November 1837–16 August 1838*, N.P., 1838. Available at http://books.google.nl/books/about/Slave_trade_East_India_Slavery_in_Ceylon.html?id=h2APAQAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Ekama, Kate, 'Slavery in Dutch Colombo: A Social History', MA thesis, Department of History, Leiden University, Netherlands, 2012.
- Engels, Friedrich, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 'Marx and Engels, Collected Works'*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975 (1845).
- Ervin, C. Wesley, *Tomorrow is Ours: The Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon, 1935–48*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2006.
- Evans, Morgan O., *Theories and Criticisms of Sir Henry Maine*, London: Stevens and Haynes, 1896. Available at https://openlibrary.org/books/OL6711320M/Theories_and_criticisms_of_Sir_Henry_Maine (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Farmer, B. H., *Ceylon: A Divided Nation*, London: Institute of Race Relations, 1963.
- Ferguson, A. M., *Ceylon Common Place Book*, N.P., 1859.
- , *Ceylon Handbook and Directory for 1866–1868*, Colombo: N.P., 1866.
- , 1871–1930. *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory*. Delhi: Asian Educational Services.
- Ferguson, John, *Ceylon in 1893*, London: J. Haddon & Co.; A. M. & J. Ferguson, 1893.
- Ferguson, J., *Ceylon in 1883*. London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1883.
- , *Ceylon in the 'Jubilee Year'*, London: J. Haddon & Co., 1887.
- FES, *Country Report on the Trade Union Situation in Sri Lanka*. Colombo, 1964. Available at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/01964.pdf> (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Fonseka, Carlo, 'Paul Caspersz—the Radical Priest'. *Sunday Island*, 16 April 2006 (*Dialogue* 32, 2005).
- Forbes, Jonathan, *Eleven Years in Ceylon*, London: Richard Bentley, 1841.
- Forrest, D. M., *A Hundred Years of Ceylon Tea 1867–1967*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1967.
- , 'Hundred Years of Achievement'. *Times of Ceylon Tea Centenary Supplement*, Colombo, 31 July 1969.

- Fraser, Nancy, 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Post-Socialist" Age' in Cynthia Willet (ed.), *Theorizing Multiculturalism: A Guide to the Current Debate*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- , 'Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition: A Two-Dimensional Approach to Gender Justice', *Studies in Social Justice* 1 (1), Winter 2007: 23–35.
- , Interview by Amrita Chhachhi. 'Reflections: Interview with Nancy Fraser', *Development and Change* 42, 2011: 297–314.
- Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko, 'The Human Development Paradigm: Operationalizing Sen's Ideas on Capabilities', *Feminist Economics* 9 (2–3), 2003: 301–17.
- Galtung, Johan, 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research'. *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (3), 1969: 167–91.
- , 'Cultural Violence'. *Journal of Peace Research* 27 (3), 1990: 291–305.
- , *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, London and New Delhi: Sage, 1996.
- Gandhi, Gopalkrishna, *Refuge*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1989 (first published in 1987, as *Saranam*).
- (ed.), *Gandhi and Sri Lanka, 1905–1947*, Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha, 2002a.
- (ed.), *Nehru and Sri Lanka, A Collection of Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches and Writings over Three Decades*, Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha, 2002b.
- Gaventa, John, 'Triumph, Deficit or Contestation: Deepening the "Deepening Democracy" Debate', *IDS Working Paper* 264, 2006.
- Goffman, Erving, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1961.
- Goonewardena, Leslie, *A Short History of the Lanka Sama Samaj Party*. Colombo: LSSP, 1960.
- Gough, Kathleen, *Rural Society in Southeast India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Green, Lewis, *The Planters Book of Caste and Custom*, Colombo: Times of Ceylon Co., 1925.
- Greenfield, S. M., 'Slavery and the Plantation in the New World', *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 2 (1), 1969: 44–57.
- Gunasinghe, Newton, *Changing Socio-Economic Relations in the Kandyan Countryside*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2007 (1990).
- Gunatilaka, Ramani, Guanghua Wan and Shiladitya Chatterjee, *Poverty and Human Development in Sri Lanka*, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2009.
- Gunawardena, Philip, 'Whither Ceylon?' *Searchlight*, 9 November 1931.
- Gunewardena, Dileni, Arunika Meedeniya and Shivapragasam Shivakumaran, 'Absolute and Relative Consumption Poverty in Sri Lanka: Evidence from the Consumer Finance Survey 2003/4', *Working Paper Series* 16, Colombo: Centre for Poverty Analysis, 2007.
- Heidemann, Frank, *Kanganies in Sri Lanka and Malaysia: Tamil Recruiter-Cum-Foreman as a Sociological Category in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, Munchen: Anacon, 1992.

- Hellmann-Rajanayagam, Dagmar, 'Drawing in Treacle: Mediation Efforts in Sri Lanka, 1983 to 2007', *Internationales Asien Forum: International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 40 (1/2), 2009: 59–96.
- Higman, B. W., *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean 1807–1834*, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 1984.
- Hjejle, Benedicte 'Slavery and Agricultural Bondage in South India in the Nineteenth Century,' *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 15, 1967: 106.
- Hobson, B. and R. Lister, 'Citizenship' in B. Hobson, J. Lewis and B. Siim (eds), *Contested Concepts in Gender and Social Politics*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2002, 23–54.
- Hoefte, Rosemarijn, 'A Passage to Suriname? The Migration of Modes of Resistance by Asian Contract Laborers'. *International Labor and Working-Class History* 54, 1998: 19–39.
- Hollup, Odavar, *Bonded Labour Caste and Cultural Identity among Tamil Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Charles Subasinghe & Sons, 1994.
- Irshick, Eugene, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916–1929*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Jackson, R. N., *Immigrant Labour and the Development of Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1961.
- Jain, R. K., *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier of Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 1970.
- Jayakody, Ruwan Laknath, 'Bitter Fate of Estate Women', *Ceylon Today*, 4 January 2014.
- Jayaraman, R., *Caste Continuities in Ceylon: A Study of the Social Structure of Three Tea Plantations*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan Press, 1975.
- Jayawardena, Kumari, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London: Zed Books, 1986.
- , *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist Consciousness 1883–1983*, Colombo: Sanjiva Books, 2003 (1985).
- , *Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, Colombo: Sanjiva Books, Social Scientists' Association; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004 (1972).
- , *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, Sanjiva Books, 2012 (2007a, 2000).
- , *Erasure of the Euro-Asians: Recovering Early Radicalism and Feminism in South Asia*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2007b.
- , *Perpetual Ferment: Popular Revolts in Sri Lanka in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2010.
- Jayawardena, L. R., 'The Supply of Sinhalese Labour to the Tea Industry in Ceylon', Research study, Cambridge University. Made available by the author, 1960.
- , 'The Supply of Sinhalese Labour to Ceylon Plantations (1830–1930): A Study of Imperial Policy in a Peasant Society', Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1963.
- Jeyeraj, D. B. S., 'In the Cause of Plantation Labour: Saumiyamoorthy Thondaman, 1913–1999', *Frontline* 16 (24), 1999.

- Joint Plantation Trade Union Committee, *Resolution and Demands*, 23 November 1983, Colombo. Made available by S. Nadesan, conference convenor.
- Kadirgamar, S., *Handy Perinbanayagam: A Memorial Volume*, Colombo: Kumaran Book House, 2012 (1980).
- Kanapathipillai, A. P., *The Epic of Tea: Politics in the Plantation of Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2011.
- Kanapathipillai, Valli, 'Repatriation or Deportation? Nation Building, Citizenship and the Indian Tamil Estate Workers in Sri Lanka after Independence'. Ph.D. thesis, Vrije, University of Amsterdam, 2005.
- , *Citizenship and Statelessness in Sri Lanka: The Case of the Tamil Estate Workers*, London and New York: Anthem Press, 2009.
- Kandappah, A., 'Of Thondaman and Thondaman'. *Sri Lanka Times*, 2004. Available at http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2008/3/25413_space.html (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Kandasamy, Menaha Vijayaluxmy, *The Struggle Continues: Women's Leadership in Plantation Trade Unions in Sri Lanka*, Kandy: Institute of Social Development, 2002.
- Kavanagh, Dennis, *Crisis, Charisma and British Political Leadership: Winston Churchill as the Outsider*, London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1974.
- Kearney, Robert N., *Trade Unions and Politics in Ceylon*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Kemp, Charles, 'The Planting Ideology in Sri Lanka: a brief inquiry into its form, content and significance in relation to the tea industry before nationalization', Paper presented at the South Asian Research Seminar Conference, SOAS, University of London, June 1985.
- King, Anthony, 'The Outsider as Political Leader: The Case of Margaret Thatcher', *British Journal of Political Science* 32, 2002: 435–54.
- Kloosterboer, Willemina, *Involuntary Labour Since the Abolition of Slavery: A Survey of Compulsory Labour throughout the World*, Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1960.
- Knottnerus, David, David L. Mark and Edward Jones, 'The Slave Plantation from a Total Institution Perspective' in Thomas Durant and David Knottnerus (eds), *Plantation Society and Race Relations*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999.
- Kodikara, Chulani, 'The Struggle for Equal Representation of Women in Sri Lanka', Colombo: Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment, and UNDP, 2009.
- Kodikara, S. U., *Indo-Ceylon Relations Since Independence*, Colombo: The Ceylon Institute of World Affairs, 1965.
- , 'Contemporary Indo-Lanka Relations', *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences* 1(1), 1978: 61–73.
- Kumar, Dharma, *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency*, London, New York and Ibadan: Cambridge University Press, 1965.
- Kurian, Rachel, *Women Workers in the Sri Lankan Plantation Sector*, Geneva: International Labour Office, 1982.

- Kurian, Rachel, 'State, Capital and Labour in the Plantation Industry in Sri Lanka 1834–1984', Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1989.
- , 'Tamil Women on Sri Lankan Plantations' in Shobita Jain and Rhoda Reddock (eds), *Women Plantation Workers: International Experiences*. Oxford and New York, Berg, 1998: 67–87.
- Kurian, Rachel and Kumari Jayawardena, 'Plantation Patriarchy and Structural Violence: Women Workers in Sri Lanka', paper presented at the Conference on Bonded Labour, Migration, Diaspora and Identity Formation in Historical and Contemporary Context, Paramaribo, Suriname, 6–10 June 2013.
- Labour Commission, *Report and Proceedings of the Labour Commission*, Sessional Paper III of 1909, Colombo, 1908: vi–xxi.
- Lal, Brij V., Doug Munro, and Edward D. Beechert (eds), *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993.
- Lawrence, A., *Malayaha Tamils: Power Sharing and Local Democracy in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2011.
- Leitan, G. R. Tressie, *Local Government and Decentralized Administration in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Lake House, 1979.
- , *Political Integration Through Decentralization and Devolution of Power: The Sri Lankan Experience*, Colombo: Department of History and Political Science, University of Colombo, 1990.
- , 'Context Study and Actor Mapping in the South Asian Region: Overview of Decentralization and Local Governance in Sri Lanka', Colombo: Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, 2010.
- Lenin, Vladimir I., *What Is to Be Done?*, N.P. 1902. Available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf> (accessed 14 November 2014).
- Lennox, Mills A., *Ceylon Under the British, 1795–1932*, London: Frank Cass, 1964.
- Lerner, Gerda, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Little, Angela, *Labouring to Learn: Towards a Political Economy Plantations, People and Education in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1999.
- Loh, Ai Tee, Booi Hon Kam and John T. Jackson, 'Sri Lanka's Plantation Sector: A Before-and-After Privatization Comparison', *Journal of International Development* 15(6), 2003: 727–45.
- London, Leslie, 'Human Rights, Environmental Justice and the Health of Farm Workers in South Africa', *International Journal of Occupation and Environmental Health* 9(1), 2003: 59–68.
- Ludowyk, E. F. C., *The Modern History of Ceylon*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.
- Majoriebanks, N. E., and A. R. Marakkayar, *Labour Emigration to Ceylon and Malaya*, Madras: Government Press, 1917.
- Malalgoda, K., *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Mandle, Jay R., 'Plantation Economy: An Essay in Definition', *Science & Society* 36, 1972: 49–62.

- Manikkam, P. P., *Tea Plantations in Crisis: An Overview*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995.
- Marshall, T. H., 'Citizenship and Social Class', 1950. Reproduced in Jeff Manza and Michael Sauder (eds), *Inequality and Society*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co. New York, 2009.
- Meenachchi, Ammal, 'The Condition of the Lives of Indian Workers' (in Tamil), Colombo: Women's Education and Research Centre, 1991 (1940).
- Mendis, G. C., *Ceylon Under the British*, Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries, 1956.
- , *Ceylon Under the British*. New Delhi and Chennai: Asian Educational Services, 2005 (first published by Colombo Apothecaries Co. in 1948).
- Meyer, Eric, 'Between Village and Plantation: Sinhalese Estate Labour in British Ceylon' in M. Gaborieau and A. Thorner (eds), *Asie du Sud: Traditions et Changements*, Paris: Colloques Internationaux du CNRS, 1979.
- , 'Enclave Plantations, Hemmed-in Villages and Dualistic Representations in Colonial Ceylon', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 19 (4), 1992: 194–228.
- Mies, Maria, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, London and New York: Zed Books, 1998 (1986).
- Millie, P. D., *Thirty Years Ago: Reminiscences of the Early Days of Coffee Planting in Ceylon*, Colombo: A.M. & J. Ferguson, 1878.
- Mills, L. A., *Ceylon under British Rule, 1792–1932*, London: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Mintz, Sidney, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.
- Moldrich, Donovan, *Bitter Berry Bondage: The 19th Century Coffee Workers of Sri Lanka*, Kandy: Co-ordinating Secretariat for Plantation Workers, 1989.
- Munro, Doug, 'Patterns of Resistance and Accommodation' in Brij V. Lal, Doug Munro and Edward D. Beechert (eds), *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993: 1–44.
- Murray, Martin. J., "'White Gold" or "White Blood": The Rubber Plantations of Colonial Indochina, 1910–40' in E. Valentine Daniel, Henry Bernstein and Tom Brass (eds), *Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Asia*, London: Frank Cass, 1992: 41–67.
- Muthiah, Subbiah, *The Indo-Lankans: Their 200 Year Saga*, Colombo: Indian Heritage Foundation, 2003.
- Nadesan, S., 'Ten Days That Shook the Plantations in Sri Lanka: Plantation Workers "Strike April 1984"', 1986. Note, made available by S. Nadesan.
- , *A History of the Up-country Tamil People in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Nandalala Publications, 1993.
- Napal, D., Manilal M. *Doctor: Pioneer of the Indo-Mauritian Emancipation*, Mauritius: Neo Press Service, 1963.
- Nieboer, H. J., *Slavery as an Industrial System*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1900.
- Northrup, David, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Nussbaum, Martha C., and Amartya Sen (eds), *The Quality of Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

- Omvedt, Gail, 'Migration in Colonial India: The Articulation of Feudalism and Capitalism by the Colonial State', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 7 (2), 1980: 185–212.
- Panikkar, K. N., 'Outsider As Enemy: Politics of Rewriting History in India', speech, 2001. Available at http://iis-db.stanford.edu/evnts/824/panikkar_speech.pdf (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Pateman, C., *The Sexual Contract*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.
- Patterson, Orlando, *The Sociology of Slavery*, London: McGibbon & Kee, 1967.
- Peebles, Patrick, *The Plantation Tamils of Ceylon: New Historical Perspectives on Migration*. London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2001.
- Pfaffenberger, Bryan. 'Sri Lanka in 1986: A Nation at the Crossroads', *Asian Survey*, 27 February 1987, 155–62.
- Phelps Brown, E. H., *The Growth of British Industrial Relations, a Study from the Standpoint of 1906–14*, London: Macmillan and Co.: New York: St. Martin's Press, 1959.
- Philips, Amali, 'Rethinking Culture and Development: Marriage and Gender among the Tea Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka', *Gender and Development* 2 (2), Taylor and Francis Ltd., 2003.
- , 'The Kinship, Marriage and Gender Experiences of Tamil Women in Sri Lanka's Tea Plantations', *Gender and Development* 11(2), 2005: 20–29.
- Plantation Sector Social Forum, 'Executive Summary', 2004. Available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/ngos/PC_SriLanka_CESCR45_SriLanka.pdf (accessed 14 November 2014).
- Ram, N., 'Dravidian Movement in Its Pre-Independence Phases'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 14 (7/8), 1979: 377–402.
- Ramachandran, N., *Foreign Plantation Investment in Ceylon 1889–1958*, Colombo: Central Bank of Ceylon, 1963.
- Ramaswamy, P., 'Labour Control and Labour Resistance in the Plantations of Colonial Malaya' in E. Valentine Daniel, Henry Bernstein and Tom Brass (eds), *Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Asia*, London: Frank Cass, 1992.
- Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972 (1971).
- , 'Justice as Fairness: Political and Not Metaphysical', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, 1985.
- Reddock, Rhoda, 'Women and Slavery in the Caribbean: A Feminist Perspective', *Latin American Perspectives* 12 (1), 1985: 63–80.
- Roberts, Michael, 'Indian Estate Labour in Ceylon During the Coffee Period, 1830–1880', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 3, 1966, 101–36.
- Roberts, Michael, Ismeth Rahim and Percy Colin Thome, *People in Between: The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformations within Sri Lanka*, Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Book Publishing Services, 1989.
- Roberts, Michael, and L. A. Wickremaratne, 'Export Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century' in K. M. de Silva (ed.), *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon III*, Colombo: University of Ceylon, 1973.
- Rogers, John D., Jonathan Spencer and Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'Sri Lanka: Political Violence and Ethnic Conflict', *American Psychologist* 53 (7), 1998: 771–77.

- Rothenberg, David M., 'Negotiation and the Dispute Resolution in the Sri Lankan Context: Lessons from the 1994–1995 Peace Talks', *Fordham International Law Journal* 22 (2), 1998: 506–76.
- Russell, Jane, *Our George: A Biography of George Edmund de Silva*, Colombo: Times of Ceylon, 1981.
- , *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution*, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1982.
- Sabaratnam, T., *Out of Bondage: The Thondaman Story*. Colombo: Sri Lanka Indian Community Council, 1990.
- Sabonadiere, William, *The Coffee Planter of Ceylon*, London: E. & F. N. Spon, 1866.
- Salih, Mohamed, 'Minorities and the Political in the Human Rights Deficit' in Karin Arts and Paschal Mihyo (eds), *Responding to the Human Rights Deficit: Essays in Honour of Bas de Gaay Fortman*, The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2003: 105–32.
- Samarasinghe, S. W. R. de A., 'Sri Lanka in 1982: A Year of Elections', *Asian Survey* 23 (2), 1983: 158–64.
- , 'Sri Lanka's Presidential Elections', *Economic and Political Weekly* 24 (3), 1989: 131–35.
- , 'The Parliamentary Elections in Sri Lanka: A Vote for Good Governance', *Asian Survey* 34 (12), 1994: 1019–34.
- Samarasinghe, S. W. R. de A., and R. Coughlan (eds), *Economic Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict: International Perspectives*, Colombo: ICES, 1991.
- Sangamaya, Janatha, *The 1971 Uprising* (in Sinhala), Colombo: N.P., 1980.
- Sangari, Kumkum, 'Politics of Diversity: Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies', *Economic and Political Weekly* 30 (51), 1995: 3287; and 30 (52), 1995: 3381–89.
- Sanger, Clive, *Malcolm MacDonald: Bringing an End to Empire*, New York: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995.
- Sarkar, N. K., *Modern India 1885–1947*, New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983.
- Saunders, Kay, *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834–1920*, London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983.
- Schwartz, Stuart B., *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550–1835*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Scott, James, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Selvaratnam, V., 'A Theoretical Perspective in the Study of Plantation Systems: The Malaysian Case', *Economic and Political Weekly* 23 (26), 1988.
- Sen, Amartya K., 'Development as Capability Expansion' in Keith Griffin and John Knight (eds), *Human Development and the International Development Strategy for the 1990s*, London: Macmillan, 1990: 41–58.
- , 'Human Rights and Capabilities', *Journal of Human Development* 6(2), 2005: 151–66.
- , *The Idea of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009.

- Senaviratne, Brian, 'Article on the Health of Plantation Workers', *Satyodaya Bulletin* No. 4, 1975.
- Shameem, Shaista, 'Migration, Labour and Plantation Women in Fiji' in Shobita Jain and Rhoda Reddock (eds), *A Historical Perspective on Women Plantation Workers: International Experiences*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998: 49–65.
- Shanmugalingam, K., 'Malaiyaka Literature—a Historical Outline'. Unpublished manuscript, 2010. Made available by the author, Colombo.
- Shanmugaratnam, N., *Privatisation of Tea Plantations: The Challenge of Reforming Production Relations in Sri Lanka, An Institutional Historical Perspective*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1997.
- Shirras, G. Findlay, 'Indian Migration' in Walter F. Willcox (ed.), *International Migrations, Vol. II: Interpretations*, Massachusetts: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1931: 591–616. Available at <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c5120.pdf> (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Silva, Kalinga Tudor, P. P. Sivapragasam and Paramsothy Thanges (eds), *Casteless or Caste-blind?: Dynamics of Concealed Caste Discrimination, Social Exclusion and Protest in Sri Lanka*. Copenhagen: International Dalit Solidarity Network; New Delhi: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies; Colombo and Chennai: Kumaran Book House, 2009.
- Simeon, Dilip, 'Writing Labour History—the Politics of the Labour Movement: An Essay on Differential Aspirations', Noida, V. V. Giri National Labour Institute, *Research Study Series* 17, 2001. Available at <http://www.sacw.net/Labour/DSimeonLabourHist.html> (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Slavery and the Slave Trade in British India; with notices of the existence of these evils in the islands of Ceylon, Malacca and Penang*. Drawn from official documents. London: Thomas Ward and Co., Paternoster Row, 1841. Available at <http://archive.org/stream/slaveryslavetrade00lond#page/n2/mode/1up> (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Smith, R. T., 'Social Stratification, Cultural Pluralism, and Integration in West Indian Societies' in Sybil Lewis and Thomas G. Matthews (eds), *Caribbean Integration Papers on Social, Political and Economic Integration*, Rio Pedras: Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1967.
- Snodgrass, D. R., *Ceylon: An Export Economy in Transition*, Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, 1966.
- Stoler, A. L., *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870–1979*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), 'General Election Manifesto', July 1977. Available at http://www.sangam.org/FB_HIST_DOCS/TULFManifesto77.htm (accessed 17 November 2014).
- Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Victor Gollancz; New York: Vintage Books, 1963.
- Thondaman, S., Speech to members of Youth Wing of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, 27 November 1984, pamphlet, Colombo: Ceylon Worker's Congress, 1984.

- Thondaman, S., *My Life and Times, An Autobiography*, Vol. 1, Colombo: Ceylon Workers Congress, 1987.
- , *Tea and Politics: An Autobiography*, New Delhi and Colombo: Navrang and Yapa, 1994.
- Tinker, Hugh, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920*, London, Bombay and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- UNHCR, 'Minorities at Risk Project' in *Chronology for Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka*, 2004. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/469f38df24.html> (accessed 12 May 2011).
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics'. New York: United Nations, 2010. Available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW_full%20report_color.pdf (accessed 18 November 2014).
- Uyangoda, Jayadeva, 'The Inner Courtyard', *Pravada* 6 (9&10), 2000: 14–19.
- , 'Minority Rights, Political Inclusion and State Reform: The Case of the Up-country Tamil Community in Sri Lanka' in Jayadeva Uyangoda and Neloufer de Mel (eds), *Reframing Democracy: Perspectives on the Cultures of Inclusion and Exclusion in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2011: 90–152.
- vanden Driesen, Ian, 'Land Sales Policy and Some Aspects of the Problem of Tenure 1836–86', *University of Ceylon Review* XV (1&2), 1957: 36–52.
- , *Indian Plantation Labour in Sri Lanka: Aspects of the History of Immigration in the 19th Century*, Perth: University of Western Australia, 1982.
- Venugopal, Rajesh, 'The Politics of Market Reform at a Time of Ethnic Conflict: Sri Lanka in the Jayewardene Years' in Kristian Stokke and Jayadeva Uyangoda (eds), *Liberal Peace in Question*, London and New York: Anthem Press, 2011.
- Vijayanathan, L., *Development Dilemmas of Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka: Politics and Violence in Relation to Human Security*, Colombo: Foundation for Community Transformation, 2007.
- Vythilingam, M., *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, Vol. 1, Jaffna: Ramanathan Commemoration Society, 1971.
- Walby, Sylvia, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Wanasinghe, Sydney, 'Failure of Communalist Politics', *Young Socialist* 13 (5), 1966.
- Weber, Max, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, Glencoe: Glencoe Press, 1952.
- Weinman, J. R., *Our Legislature: Interesting and Racy Reminiscences of Persons and Incidents Connected with the Old Legislative Council*, Colombo: Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd., 1947.
- Wenzlhuemer, Ronald, *From Coffee to Tea Cultivation in Ceylon, 1880–1900: An Economic and Social History*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008.
- Wesumperuma, W., *Indian Immigrant Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka: A Historical Perspective 1880–1910*, Kelaniya: Vidyalandara Press, 1986.
- Wickramasinghe, Chandima, 'Coloured Slavery in Ceylon (Sri Lanka)', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Colombo Branch, 54 (new series), 2008: 159–78.

- Wickramasinghe, Nira, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, London: C. Hurst & Co., 2006.
- Wijayatilake, Kamalini and Faizun Zackariya, *Sexual Harassment at Work: Sri Lankan Study on the Plantation Sector*, Colombo: ILO, 2001.
- Williams, Eric, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1944.
- Wilson, A. J., *Electoral Politics in an Emergent State: The Ceylon General Election of May 1970*, London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- , *S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, 1947–1977: A Political Biography*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.
- Winslow, Deborah, and Michael D. Woost (eds), *Economy, Culture, and Civil War in Sri Lanka*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Wolf, Eric R., 'Specific Aspects of Plantation Systems in the New World: Community Sub-Cultures and Social Classes' in *Plantation Systems of the New World*. Washington D.C.: Pan American Union, 1959.
- , *Pathways of Power: Building an Anthropology of the Modern World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Women and Media Collective (ed.), *Sri Lanka Shadow Report to CEDAW*, Colombo, Sri Lanka: Women and Media Collective, 2010.
- Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, Report on the Visit to Sri Lanka (7–18 October), United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 1991.
- World Bank, *Poverty Assessment, Engendering Growth with Equity: Opportunities and Challenges*. 23 January, Report No. 36568-LK. Colombo: Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Sector Unit, South Asia Region, 2007.
- , 'Sri Lanka: An Overview', n.d. Available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/overview> (accessed 13 November 2014).
- Wright, Arnold (ed.), *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, London: Lloyds Greater Britain Publishing Co. Ltd., 1907.

OFFICIAL REPORTS

- Annual Reports of the Agent for the Government of India.
- Bracegirdle Commission Report
- Ceylon Administrative Reports
- Ceylon Labour Commission Handbook, Dodson Press, 1935.
- Ceylon Labour Foundation files, *The General Strike of 1980 and the Position of the Ceylon Workers Congress*, Colombo, mimeo, n.d.
- 'Coolies in Ceylon', Enclosure, 1869.
- Department of Census and Statistics, Demographic and Health Survey 2006–07, Colombo, 2009.
- , Department of Census and Statistics, 'Poverty Indicators: Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2009/10', Colombo: Ministry of Finance

Bibliography

- and Planning, 2011. Available at http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/PovertyIndicators2009_10.pdf (accessed 14 November 2014).
- Department of Census and Statistics, 'Poverty in Sri Lanka (based on Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2006/07', Colombo: Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2012. Available at <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/reportnew-Final.pdf> (accessed 14 November 2014).
- , 'Poverty Review: A Study of Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2009/10', Colombo: Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2013.
- Memorandum on the Control of the Immigration Department, Governor, 1894.
- Parliament of Sri Lanka, 'Referendums.' Available at <http://www.parliament.lk/referendums> (accessed 14 November 2014).
- 'Presidential Election: 20.10.1982.' Available at <http://www.slections.gov.lk/pdf/1982%20Presidential.pdf> (accessed 14 November 2014).
- Reports of the Agent of the Government of India.
- Report and Proceedings of the Labour Commission, Colombo, 1908.
- Report of C. B. Kumarasinghe (ACL), 1940.
- Report of Conference with the Minister of Labour, 1939.
- Report of Interview with the Governor, 1939.
- Report of the Commission to Inquire into the Conditions of Immigrant Tamil Labourers in Sabaragamuwa, Colombo, 1914.
- Reports of the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour
- Report of the Controller of Labour, 1939.
- Report of the Immigrant Labour Commission of Ceylon, 30 June 1859.
- Report of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission, Sessional Paper xviii, 1951.
- Report of the Labour Commission, Colombo, 1908.
- Report of the Special Commission on the Constitution, London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1928.
- Report of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (undertaken 7–18 October 1991).
- Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act, 1932.
- Sansoni Commission Report, 1980
- UNDP, Human Development Reports, Sri Lanka
- UNDP and Ministry of Nation Building and Estate Infrastructure Development, *National Plan of Action (NPA) for Social Development of the Plantation Community (2006–2015)*, 2007.

NEWSPAPERS, JOURNALS AND MISCELLANEOUS STATEMENTS AND REPORTS

Aththa

Ceylon Daily News
Ceylon Sunday Times
Congress News and Views

Bibliography

Ceylon Today
Ceylon Workers Congress statements
Ceylon Workers Congress, Statement by CWC National at emergency meeting
14 Aug.1983 held under the chairmanship of the President, S. Thondaman,
Colombo.
Daily Mirror (Colombo)
Desabhaktan
Frontline
Hansard (Sri Lanka)
Hindu
Island
Manifesto of UNP 1977
National Plan of Action (Sri Lanka)
National Plan of Action (NPA) Report of 2007
Planters' Association Files
Planters' Association Yearbooks
Report of the Donoughmore Commission
Samasamajist
The Searchlight
Sri Lanka National Archives (SLNA)
Sri Lanka Statistics
Sun (Colombo)
Sunday Times (Sri Lanka)
Times of Ceylon
Virakesari
Voice of the Voiceless (Kandy Satyodaya)
The Voice of Women (Colombo)
World Bank Report
Young Socialist (Colombo)

Index

- African slaves, 7, 8
 - conversion to Christianity of, 61
 - transportation of slaves from, 19
- Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization, 186
- Aiyar, Satyavagisavara, 119, 123, 124
- All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, 209
- All Ceylon Indian Estate Labour Federation, 100, 110–13, 177
 - plantation trade union, 100ff
 - political activism of, 101–02, 114–15
 - strike by union of, 156
 - on wages of workers, 105, 106, 114
- All-Ceylon Estate Workers' Union, 1939, 130, 164, 165, 187
- All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), 236, 268
- All-India Congress Committee on Employment in Ceylon, 150
- Amirthalingam, Appapillai, 211, 215, 236
- Andrews, C.F., 88
- Andrews, Robert, 22
- Annadurai, C.N., 98
- anti-Brahmin movement/agitation, in south India, 91, 311
 - Tamil consciousness, 97–99
- Anti-poppy Day campaign, 128
- anti-slavery campaign/movement, in Britain, 9, 65
 - in Europe, 22
- Anti-Slavery Society, 92
- anti-Tamil legislation, 267
- anti-Tamil pogrom, 246–48, 266
- anti-Tamil riots/violence, 212, 221, 236, 242–43, 249, 252, 315
- Ariyatileke, Gamini, 231
- arkatti* system, 15
- Arulnayagi, 306
- Arunachalam, K., 114
- Arunachalam, P., 80, 82, 103, 306, 311
 - on labour rights, 85–90
 - as President of Ceylon National Congress, 85
- Attampitiya strike, 162–63
- Aziz, Abdul, 152, 186–87, 195, 206, 214, 226, 246, 274, 314, 316
 - president of DWC, 231, 274n
- Aziz, Ashraf, 274n
- Bandaranaike, Sirimavo, 211, 234, 243
 - Chelvanayakam Pact, 212, 213
 - government of, 213, 214
 - and Lal Bahadur Shastri agreement, 214
- Bandaranaike, S.W.R.D., 152, 171, 194, 207, 211–12

- Barnes, Governor Edward, 24
 Bertram, Anton, 88
 Bharati, S., 119
 Bolshevik Leninist Party, 187, 194
 Bolster, George, 175, 177
 'bolting', in Ceylon, 46, 49, 60–61
 bondage, 27–34
 of workers to planters, 11, 309
 see also bonded labour
 'bonded labour', 18, 21, 31, 32, 69
 Bracegirdle, Mark Anthony, 125, 126,
 130–37, 175
 deportation order on, 132, 133
 and LSSP, 131
 'Bracegirdle incident', 130, 132–34
 Britain, first General Strike of 1926, 107
 British Anti-Slavery Society, 69
 British Labour Party, 88
 see also Labour Party of Britain
 British Trade Union Congress, 107, 108
 movement, 179
 Brown, Granville Orde, 177, 189
 Buddhism, in Ceylon, 209–10, 239
 Buddhist and Hindu reformist
 movements, 85
 Burrows, S.M., 76, 77

 Cader, Arulvaki Abdul, 62, 94
 Caldecott, Andrew, Governor, 136,
 147, 161
 and planters, 175–76
 Cameron, C.H., 23
 Campbell, G.W.R., 49
 capitation taxes, abolition of, 22
 Carey, J.C., 112
 Carnavon, Earl, 70
 Casperz, Father Paul, 278
 caste, -based exclusion, 281
 discrimination, 319
 and franchise issue, 142, 281
 and labour control, 40–41
 oppression in south India, 311
 Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA),
 272–73, 295
 Report of, 296, 297

 Ceylon Association, London, 191
 Ceylon Citizenship Act, of 1948, 200
 Ceylon Dravidian Federation, 98
 Ceylon Estates Proprietary Association
 (CEPA), 158, 173n, 178, 191
 Ceylon Estates Staff Union, 257
 Ceylon Estate Workers Union, 157
 Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC), 107,
 150, 151, 152, 157, 177, 185, 186,
 187, 189, 190, 193, 195, 206–07,
 313, 315
 condemning Citizenship Act, 202,
 204
 and parliamentary elections of
 1947, 199
 Trade Union, 162, 182, 185, 186
 Ceylon Indian Workers' Federation,
 177, 185
 Ceylon Labour Party, 123, 142
 Ceylon Labour Union (1922), 84, 89,
 101, 127, 149
 Ceylon Legislative Council, 102
 Ceylon Mercantile Union, 230, 241
 Ceylon National Congress (1919), 84,
 85, 89, 123, 142
 Ceylon Plantation Workers' Union, 306
 Ceylon Reform League (1906), 84
 'Ceylon Tamils', 221
 Ceylon Trade Union Federation, 186
 on Wage Board Ordinance, 182
 Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC),
 216, 225, 227, 241–42, 256, 257,
 259, 270, 285, 305
 on Indo-Ceylon agreement, 214, 215
 leadership of, 247, 274–76, 315, 316
 National Committee of, 247
 representation in Cabinet, 237–39
 Ceylon Workers' Federation (1920),
 84, 88
 Ceylon Workers' Union, 188
 Ceylon Workers' Welfare League (1919),
 84, 88
 Ceylonese planters, appointment
 of, 38
 Ceylonese slaves, transportation of, 20

- Chandrasekaran, Periyasamy, 270, 275, 286, 316
 detention under Prevention of Terrorism Act, 276
 in politics, 276–77
 Chattopadhyay, Kamaladevi, 96, 129–31, 135
 on exploitation of workers, 124–25
 Chelvanayakam, S.J.V., 203, 206, 211
 Chettiar, V.R.M. Letchman, 151, 185
 child labour, 75, 77, 114
 Chinese contract system, 15
 Christianity, conversion to, 61
 Citizenship Acts, of 1948 and 1949, 210, 268
 Citizenship and Franchise Acts of 1948 and 1949, 199–205, 213, 313, 314
 citizenship, qualification for, 200–201, 205
 citizenship laws, 208
 citizenship rights, ethnic tension and, 209ff
 and franchise rights, 152–53
 plantation workers and, 1, 258, 262, 318
 political gains of, 258–62
 statelessness and repatriation, 199ff
 coffee plantations, in Ceylon, 25, 29, 38
 resistance by workers on, 56–57
 coffee production, in Ceylon, 2, 30
 'Coffee Stealing Ordinance', of 1876, 57, 70, 82
 Colebrooke, W.M.G., 21, 23
 Colebrooke-Cameron reforms, 24
 Colepeper, J.S., 45
 Collective Agreement, of 1940, 184
 Colombo Municipal Council, 94
 Colonial Office in Ceylon, 18, 143, 160
 policy, 168, 171, 173
 colonial policy on plantations, 23–27
 Commission of Inquiry, in Ceylon, 23, 74
 Committee of Plantation Trade Unions (CPTU), 230
 Communist Party (CP) of Ceylon, 186, 188, 201, 227, 230
 compulsion and bondage in Ceylon, 27–34
 Congress Socialist Party, 125
 Constitution, of 1972, 224
 of 1978, 239–40, 261
 amendments to, 240
 on 'citizenship by descent', 239
 constitutional reforms, 89, 102, 143
 Controller of Labour, 155, 156, 157, 172, 173, 191
 on LSSP trade union, 159
 on Seven-Point Agreement, 180
 'coolie', labour in Ceylon, 30, 37, 50
 Coomaraswamy, Muttu, 90, 311
 on 'our countrymen', 80–82
 Coordinating Secretariat for Plantation Area, 228, 278
 on citizenship, 200–201
 Corea, C.E., 171
 Corea, G.C.S. (Claude), 171
 Corea, Victor, 171
 Cousins, Margaret, 118, 124
 Covia caste slaves, 21
 'criminal trespass', law governing, 51
 'crimping' practice, 46
 Crossman, A.L., 74
 culture, and religion, 61–64
 Davidson, C., 176
 de Silva, Agnes, 116
 and voting rights, 122–23
 de Silva, Colvin R., 132, 133, 134, 164, 166, 192, 194, 206, 230, 244n, 254
 de Silva, George E., 119, 123, 148, 180
 debt bondage, 11, 29, 33, 60
 democracy, 278–82, 312–18
 Democratic Workers' Congress (DWC), 230, 253
 formation of, 274
 on Indo-Ceylon Agreement, 214
 strike by, 216
 Democratic Workers' Union, 314

- Demographic and Health Survey, of
2006–07, 290, 303
- Department of Census and Statistics,
294
- Department of Education, Ceylon, 78
- Department of Labour, 155
- Dias, C.P., 94
- discrimination, 313
- economic, political and ethnic, 3,
232–33, 298
 - gender-based, 3
- Dissanayake, Gamini, 253, 255
- District Development Councils, 240
- domestic violence, 12, 301–302, 318
- Donoughmore Commission, 142–46
- Donoughmore Constitution, 154
- Donoughmore reforms, 143
- Donoughmore Report, 142, 143
- van Dort, W.G., 71
- Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK),
98, 219
- movements, 220
- Dravidian movement in south India, 99
- drinking problems of workers, 57–58
- Dutch East India Company, 19, 20
- economic depression, 170
- impact on tea and rubber industries,
109
- economic discrimination, 232–33
- joint action against, 250–52
- economic insecurity, ethnic tension
and, 233–34
- education, 75, 288–90
- of girls, 117
 - provision of, 74–79
 - restrictions for workers, 49–51
 - role of, 51
 - in Sinhala and Tamil, 209
- Education Ordinance of 1920, 78, 130
- Eelam Peoples Democratic Front
(EDPF), 270
- elections, of 1931 and 1936, 146
- of 1952, 205
- Elliot, Christopher, 71
- Emancipation Act, of 1833, 29
- Emergency Power Order-in-Council,
165
- employment of women, 118
- equal pay, 262
- Essential Services Act, of 1979, 241
- Essential Services Ordinance, 1942,
192, 193
- Estate Labour Federation, 113
- estate land alienation, policy of, 231
- Estates Wage Committee, 258
- Estate Workers' Union, 162–63
- ethnic/ethnicity, 312–16
- chauvinism, in politics, 221–22
 - deepening democracy, 316–18
 - discrimination, 146–48, 174, 319
 - hostility to Indian workers, 148–50,
217, 221, 222, 281
 - identity, 276–78, 281, 284
- ethnic conflict, 259, 260, 276, 315, 316
- ethnic tension and citizenship 209ff
and economic insecurity, 211,
233–34
- politics and, 212–14
- entitlements, of planters, 287–88
- exploitation, of workers, 50, 52, 60,
310, 310
- of plantation women workers,
118–19
- famines in Ceylon, 29
- Far East India Association, 75
- Fawcett, Millicent Garrett, 118
- Federal Party, 203, 207, 211, 236,
267, 268
- satyagraha by, 213
- Fernando, C. H. Z., 93, 94, 144
- folk songs, 61–62
- food shortage, 228, 231
- Forrest, D.M., 37, 39
- Foundation for Community
Transformation (FCT), on Tamil
community, 279
- franchise, and citizenship rights, 152–
53, 312

- controversies and contestations
 over, 141ff
 and ethnic discrimination, 146–48
 laws, 199
 limits to rights, 144–46
see also voting rights
- Gandhi, Mahatma, 85, 88, 91, 119, 123, 186, 311
 on indentured labour in South Africa, 99n
 non-violence policy of, 186
 tour of Ceylon by, 95–96
- Gandhi, Rajiv, killing of, 267
- Gandhi Sangham*, 145
- gender, bias, 12, 299
 discrimination, 319
 division of labour, 41, 43, 300
- Gimson, Frank, 79, 154, 156, 171–73
 ‘Statement of Policy’ of, 180
- girls, attendance in school, 77
 education of, 50, 117
- Goonesinha, A.E., 89, 94, 108, 112, 123, 127, 128, 132, 142, 145, 148, 171
 Ceylon Labour Union of, 95
 on ‘equal rights’, 202
 as labour leader, 50
 Natesa Aiyar and, 101
- Goonewardena, Leslie, 136, 163, 164, 166
- Gordon, Arthur, Governor, 43
- Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act, of 1986, 261
- Greater Colombo Development Scheme, 244
- Gunawardena, Philip, 128, 129, 134, 166, 215
- Hamilton, D.E., 178
- Hamilton, Vereker Monteith, paintings by, 63–64
- hartal*, 189, 193, 207
- health, 290–92
 birth rates, 290
 and family planning, 292–93
 infant mortality, 290
 maternity services, 291
 nutrition levels, 290–91
 poor facilities in plantations, 71
- hierarchies, in plantations, 36–37, 309–10
- Household Income and Expenditure Survey, of 2009–10, 294
- human development, 288–97
 social justice and, 283ff
- Human Development Index, 289
- Human Development Report, 285
- Immigrant Labour Commission, 30, 33
- imprisonment of plantation workers, 88
- income, and poverty, 293–96
- Indasara, K., 206
- indebtedness, 29, 31, 33, 44–45, 48, 51, 56, 162, 283
- indentured labour, 9–10, 13, 28
- Indian Association, 94, 103
- Indian Emigration Act, 1922, 103
- Indian Estate Workers’ Federation, 112
- Indian government, ban on emigration of Indian workers to Ceylon, 107
 and community response of, 150–52
 on wages of migrant labourers, 104
- Indian Immigrant Labour Ordinance, 1923, 103
- Indian National Congress, 91, 95, 125, 129–30
- Indian national movement, 91, 98
- Indian Ocean, slavery in, 19–22
- Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act, of 1949, 200, 203, 204
- ‘Indian Tamils’, in Ceylon, 207, 212, 280, 309
 and Ceylon Tamils, 221–22
 and Indian government (1941), 192
- Indo-Ceylon Act of 1967, 240
- Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964, 214–18, 222

- Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1981, 240
 Indo-Ceylon Agreement
 (Implementation) Acts of 1967,
 238
 on citizenship and repatriation, 281
 industrial action, spread of, 257–58
 infant mortality, 228, 290
 International Confederation of Free
 Trade Unions (ICFTU), 242
 International Conference on
 Population and Development,
 Cairo, 292
 International Union of Food and
 Allied Workers' Association, 242
- Janatha Estate Development Board
 (JEDB), 272
 Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP),
 and plantation labour, 218–20
 uprising by, 224
 JVP rebellion, 266
- Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), 270
 Jayah, T.B., 144, 203
 Jayatilake, D.B., 94
 Jayewardene, J.R., 194, 227, 236, 237,
 238, 240, 246, 256, 270
 winning the elections of 1982, 244
 'jobber', 10–11
 Johnston, Alexander, 22, 70, 81
 Joint Committee of Plantation Trade
 Unions (JCPTU), 226, 229, 230, 256
 Joint Trade Union Action Committee
 (JTUAC), 241
 Joint Plantation Trade Union Committee
 (JPTUC), strike by, 253, 254
 Joseph, Teliwatte, 280
- Kandasamy, Menaha, 303, 306
 kangany system, 32, 33, 40, 42, 45, 70
 kanganies, 166, 175
 power of, 44–48, 58
 Knavesmire struggle, 188–91
Kavadi Chinthu (songs), 62
 Keuneman, Pieter, 201, 206
- Kumaratunga, Chandrika, 269, 270, 277
 policy on plantations, 272, 274
- Labour Commission, 45, 47, 51
 Report of, 46, 48
 Labour Department, 162, 171, 172,
 177–78, 191
 Labour Ordinance, 311
 of 1865, 73, 83–84, 87–88
 of 1889, 223, 230
 Labour Party of Britain, 168, 169,
 182, 194
 Land Reform Law of 1972, 225
 Land Reform (Amendment) Law,
 1975, 225
 Land Reforms, of 1972 and 1975, 235,
 285, 314
 Lanka Estates Workers' Union, (LEWU),
 254
 Lanka Jathika Estate Workers' Union
 (LJEWU), 253, 254, 255, 257
 strike by, 274
 Lanka Sama Samaj Party (LSSP), 125,
 135, 147, 158, 165, 166, 167, 176,
 185, 187, 201
 'Bracegirdle incident', 131–32
 militant strikes by, 39n, 165
 Union, 128–30, 136, 157–59,
 161–62
 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
 (LTTE), 267, 269
 linguistic nationalism, 211
 liquor demand, 52–53
 literacy rate, 289
 of women, 117
 Local Bodies Election Ordinance,
 repeal of (1978), 240
 Low-Country Planters' Association, 182
- MacBae, Paul, 38
 MacDonald, Malcolm, 79, 156
 policies of, 169–71
 MacDonald, Ramsey, 108, 123, 169
 Madras Legislative Assembly, 204
 Madras Presidency, 31, 32

- Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), 210
 Mahaweli Project, 244, 246
 Maitland, Thomas, Governor, 70
 Malayaha Tamil, 221
 Manilal, D.M., 101, 119, 311
 deportation from Ceylon, 93–94
 expulsion from Fiji, 93, 120
 formation of Indian Imperial Association, 93
 and Indian labour, 92–95
 in Mauritius, 92–93
 Manilal, Jayunkvar, 93, 119–20, 311
 Mao Zedong, 218
 Meenachi, Ammal, 114
 and workers'/ women's rights, 120–22
 Masilamani, Mangalammal, 121
 medical officials on estates, 71–73
 Medical Ordinance, of 1872, Ceylon, 72
 of 1880, 72
 Meiappen, 165, 166
 militancy by workers, 127, 136, 158, 163–164, 166, 193–94, 246–48
 Millennium Development Goals, 288
 minimum wage controversy, 109–111
 Minimum Wage Ordinance, 1927, 108, 112, 129, 169n
 Ministry of Estate Housing Infrastructure and Community Development, 286
 Ministry of Nation Building and Estate Infrastructure Development, 286
 mobility restrictions on labour, 43–49, 53
 Mooloya strike, 159–61
 Morford, Kenneth, 191
 mortality rates on plantations, 71, 73, 74, 228, 311
 Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE), 278n
 Murugesu, Nalamma, 123–24
Mutchanthi Illakiyam (Literature of the junction), 62
 Muttukrishna, Lilamani, 93, 94, 120
 Nadesan, S., 186, 201, 246
 Naidu, Sarojini, 96, 118, 124
 Nallava caste, 21, 22
 Natesa Aiyar, K., 73, 93, 95, 107, 108, 110, 113, 119, 120, 121, 127, 130, 144, 146, 150, 155, 185, 202
 National Workers' Union, 305
 nationalisation of plantations, debate on, 223
 Nehru, Jawaharlal, 95–97, 123, 150, 157, 311
 visit to Ceylon, 95–97, 185, 313
 non-cooperation movement, in India, 91
Nondhi Chinthu (songs), 62
 Official Language Act (No 33 of 1956), 211
 'open economy' policy, 244–45
 Pallar caste, 21, 22
 Parliamentary election of 2000, 275
 Parliamentary Election Amendment Act, of 1949, 200, 204
 People's Alliance (PA), 269
 Government of, 272
 Pereira, H.J.C., 90, 311
 opposition to 'refined slavery', 83–84
 Perera, H.V., 133, 184, 190
 Pereira, I.X., 112, 180
 Perera, N. M., 127, 132, 134, 147, 163–166, 192, 195, 201, 213
 Perimbanayagam, Handy, 124
Periya dorai (big master), 36
 Periyar, (E.V. Ramasami Naickar), 97
 visit to Ceylon, 97–98
 anti-Brahmin movement by, in south India, 311
 Perumalammal, female kangany, 40
 petitions by workers, 64–65
 Plantation Housing and Social Welfare Trust, 285
 Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT), 285, 286

- Plantation Sector Social Forum, 279
 plantation workers, agitation for
 monthly wages, 228–32
 ‘captive labour’ status of, 3, 51, 208,
 243, 305, 309
 denial of economic and labour
 rights to, 232, 234
 imprisonment of, 84, 87, 88
 Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP),
 218–20
 liquor consumption by, 52–53
 living conditions of, 37, 82, 88, 136,
 149, 273
 performance, dramatic and musical,
 62–63
 recruitment of, 10, 15, 32, 60, 103
 rights of, 137, 154, 169, 265, 313
 terms of contract, 44, 45
 planters, 37–39, 174–76, 181
 desertion by, 15
 division among, 172–77
 on drinking problems of workers,
 52, 57–58
 on unions and LSSP, 128–30
 on unrest of workers, 55, 172
 violence against, 58–59
 Planters’ Association, 46, 49, 60, 72,
 75, 76, 81, 87, 103, 104, 108, 113,
 155, 158, 165, 167, 173, 174, 178,
 179, 180–81, 191
 Planters’ Labour Federation, 48
 Ponnambalam, G.G., 203, 217, 244n
 Pope, George, 166
 murder case, 164–67
 Portuguese, colonial rule in Ceylon, 8, 20
 Poverty Head Count Index (HCI),
 294, 296
 ‘prayer campaign’ of 1986, 250, 259,
 260, 262
 Premadasa, Ranasinghe, President,
 266, 269, 270
 Presidential election and Referendum
 of 1982, 243–44
 Press Bill, 216
 Provincial Councils, 269, 274
 Provincial Councils Act, of 1987,
 1989, 274
 Purcell, A.P., 108
 Puthumaippithan (S. Viruthasalam),
 119
 Railway Workers’ Association (1912),
 84
 railways, spread of, 26
 strike of 1912, 85
 and tea plantations, 26
 Rajagopalachari, C., 96
rajakariya, 18, 24
 abolition of, 27
 Rajalingam, K., 186, 195
 Rajapakse, Mahindra, 270, 271
 Ramachandran, M.G., 219, 220
 Ramanathan, P., 57, 64, 82–83, 121,
 124, 142, 311
 Ranagabodde strike, 161–62
 reconciliation policies, Malcolm
 MacDonald and, 169–71
 Red Flag Women’s Movement
 (RFMW), 306, 307
 repatriation of Indian workers, 97,
 148–50, 215, 240, 243
 Rose, Merinal, 306
 rubber cultivation/industry, in Ceylon,
 2, 27
 privatization of, 272
 slump in, 193
 Russell, John, 10, 69
 Sabaragamuwa Commission, 87
 salary payment, 47, 73
 Samarakkoddy, Edmund, 164, 166
 Sansoni Commission Report, 236–37
 Saraswathi, Sivaguru, 292, 305
 Satyagraha of 1952, 205–08
 Satyodaya, 278
 Satyawagiswara, Nalamma, 94
 schools, in Ceylon, 50, 51, 77, 78,
 288–89
 lack of, 75
 see also education

- Scott, Robert C., 155, 173, 174
 Self-Respect Movement, in Colombo, 98
 in Madras, 97, 98
 Sellasamy, M. S., 225, 255, 257, 275
 Selvanayagam, 190, 191
 Selvaratnam, Betsy, 305
 Senanayake, D.S., 94, 144, 189, 191, 193, 194, 200, 205, 215–17, 238
 Seven-Point Agreement, 177–80, 186
 abrogation of, 184, 191–92, 194
 Shastri, Lal Bahadur, 214
 Shields, Drummond, 79, 123, 142
 Sinhala/Sinhalese, bourgeoisie, 148, 208
 -Buddhist heritage, 210, 211
 nationalism, 218, 219
 politicians, 143–44, 152, 313
 Sinhala Maha Sangha, 259
 Sinhala Merchants' Chamber, 182
 'Sinhala Only' Act, 210–13
 Sinhalese language, 209, 261, 239
 Sivarajah, Anushiya, 305
 slavery, 137, 309
 abolition of, 2, 9, 11, 13, 18
 challenging, 22–23
 Social Development Division (SSD), 285
 Social Service League, 84, 86, 87
 Soulbury Commission, 153
 Soulbury Constitution, 192–93
 elections under, 194–95
 Sri Lanka Demographic Health Survey, 2006–07, 301
 Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), 207, 209, 213, 214, 217–18, 314
 attack on, 236
 opposition to government of, 235
 'Sinhala Only' platform, 210
 Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, 270
 Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation (SLSPC), 225, 271
 Sirimavo-Gandhi Agreement of 1974, 238
 'Standardize wages' debate, 103–104
 State Council, 143, 147, 149, 150, 153, 171, 182, 192
 elections to, 1931, 111
 'statelessness' issue, 215, 243, 259
 Stellenberg estate, violence in, 164–66
 strikes, general, of 1923, 50, 89, 108, 127
 of 1939–40, 155–58
 of 1980, 241–42
 of 1984, 272
 militant, in Ceylon, 59, 176, 189, 230
 by urban workers, 49–50
 for wage increase, 253–57
 Stubbs, Edward Reginald, Governor, 131, 134, 136, 175
 Subbiah, S. M., 195, 274
 Sundaram, Peri, 111, 146, 153, 186, 185, 191
 Suriya Mal campaign, 128
 Tamil Church Mission, 75
 Tamil consciousness, and anti-Brahmin agitation, 97–99
 Tamil culture(al), activists in, 64
 Influence, 219
 and social reform, 98
 Tamil Congress, 203, 221, 236, 268
 Tamil Federal Party, 211
 Tamil language, in administration, 212
 as 'national language', 239
 as official language, 209
 Tamil Language (Special Province) Act, 211, 212
 Tamil migrant workers, 3, 76, 81, 82, 91
 on 'citizenship' issue, 208
 tension between Sinhalese and, 1, 236, 258, 276, 316
 see also ethnic conflict
 Tamil National Alliance, 271
 Tamil politicians, and franchise issue, 142
 Tamil United Front (TUF), 268
 Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), 236, 238, 239, 268, 314, 315
 Taylor, James, 25n

- tea plantations in Ceylon, 2, 25–26, 254
 and demand for labour, 31, 32
 privatisation of, 272
 temperance campaign, 85
 Temple, H.J., 168, 179
 Tennent, James Emerson, 30, 43, 46, 70
 Thondaman, Armugam, 270, 271, 275, 286
 Thondaman, Savumiamoorthy, 186, 187, 189, 190, 191, 195, 206, 213, 216, 217, 227, 233, 236, 238, 240, 243, 246, 248, 250, 256, 257, 258, 259, 279, 262, 268, 313, 314, 316
 death of, 317
 on development of schools, 289
 leadership of, 315
 as Minister, 238, 242, 251, 272, 285, 315
 'Tin-Ticket', introduction of, by British, 48
 trade unions, in Ceylon, 1, 50, 65, 97, 126, 154, 169, 248, 276, 305, 312–16, 318, 319
 on fines on workers, 181
 growth of, 185–88
 membership of, 185
 militancy, 193–94
 Natesa Aiyar and first plantation, 100ff
 objects and influence of, 168
 protests by, 273
 rights of workers, 231
 Tramway strike, 1929, 127
 'truck system', in wages, 44, 181
 tundu system, 45–46, 48, 105
- Under Planter Raj*, Natesa Aiyar, 102, 104–108
 unemployment, 148, 149, 194, 210, 245
 United Front (UF), government, 238
 land reform under, 234
 on wages, 224
 United Left Front, split in, 214
 United National Party, 194, 195
 United Nations, Decade of Women (1975–85), 252, 318
 UNDP Human Development Reports (HDRs), 284, 285
 United National Party (UNP),
 government of, 207, 212, 235–36, 260
 and CWC, 239
 privatisation of plantations by, 271–72
 winning elections, 216, 245, 315
 UPFA coalition, 271
 United Plantation Workers Union, 230
 Up-Country Democratic Front (UDF), 270
 Up-Country People's Front, 270, 275–77, 316
 Up-Country Workers' Front, 275
 Usawasama, 225n
- vagrancy, decrees against, 11
 Vamadevan, M., 286, 287
 Vellala caste, 142n
 Vellusamy, O.M., 130, 160
 Velupillai, C.V., 195, 274, 304
 village committee franchise, 147
 Village Committees Ordinance, 146, 147, 313
 Village Communities (Amendment) Ordinance, 147
 Village Expansion Scheme, 188
 village franchise, and ethnic discrimination, 146–48
 Villiers, Thomas, 109, 175
 violence
 against planters, 58–59
 anti-Tamil, 246
 challenging, 248–49
 against women, 301–304
 in plantations, 11, 16–17, 163–64
 political and ethnic, 266–67
 post-election of 1977, 236–37
 see also domestic violence
 VLSSP, 210
 'Voice of Women', 252

Index

- voting rights, 238, 244
 - castes and class and, 142
 - Agnes de Silva and, 122–23
- Vytilingam, S.P., 112, 146
- wage(s), agitation, 228–32
 - demand for increase in, 158
 - for plantation workers, 43–44, 47, 56, 97, 103–06, 108, 111, 114, 224
- Wages Boards, 182, 251
- Wages Board Bill, 1941, 180
- Wages Boards Ordinance, 1941, 180–83
- 'We Tamil' movement, 220
- Wedgwood, Josiah, 88, 89, 99
- 'West India system of cultivation', 35
- Wewessa strike, 162–63
- Wickremasinghe, S.A., 128, 192
- 'wife-beating', 301–302
- Wilberforce, William, 22, 65
- Wijeweera, Rohana, 218, 244n, 266
- women, discrimination of workers, 3, 13, 14, 298–99, 318
 - kanganies, 40
 - legislators, 118
 - in plantations, 12, 31–32, 41, 118
 - political rights of, 117–18
 - and politics, 299–301, 304–307, violence against, 14, 301–304
 - voting rights of, 121, 123, 142
 - wages for, 114, 252–53
- Women's Freedom League, 118
- Women's Franchise Union, Ceylon, 121, 123, 142
- Young Lanka League, 84
- Young Men's Hindu Association, 92
- Youth Congress, Ceylon, 124
- Youth Leagues, 128, 171

Also in this series

GENDERING COLONIAL INDIA

Reforms, Print, Caste and Communalism

Charu Gupta

ADIVASIS AND THE RAJ

Socio-Economic Transition of the Hos, 1820–1932

Sanjukta Das Gupta



Orient BlackSwan

www.orientblackswan.com

ISBN 978 81 250 5878 6



9 788125 058786

Jayawardena and Kurian: *Class, Patriarchy and Ethnicity
on Sri Lankan Plantations*