

CFTU

and

THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

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The
C. F. T. U.
and the
Working Class Movement

Colombo
Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions
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PREFACE

It is with joy and pride that we celebrate the Silver Jubilee and the 17th Sessions of the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions from 19th to 22nd August 1966.

Our trade union movement really started in 1939 and it is 27 years old although we are celebrating the Silver Jubilee this year. Due to various reasons, including the proclamation of an emergency, we could not hold the celebrations earlier as we had originally intended.

We are happy to state that, while we celebrate the Silver Jubilee and the 17th sessions, the over whelming majority of the pioneers of our progressive trade union movement are still in our midst and are making an invaluable contribution to the cause for which we dedicated almost the whole of our life time that is for the cause of national independence for our motherland, democracy, peace and social progress.

The poineers who are still with us and are fighting shoulder to shoulder for our common cause are Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe, Pieter Keuneman, Rev. U. Saranankara, A. Vaidialingam, T. Duraisingam, W. Ariyaratne, D. P. Yasodis, M. L. Arnolis Appuhamy, H. G. S. Ratnaweera and others.

K. Ramanathan and P. Sankar, who are now in India, rendered yeomen service to build up our trade union movement and are carrying forward the same struggle in their motherland. Just a few have become renegades and left us, some causing great damage to our cause, like Sanmugathan.

This short history of the working class movement has been compiled by a Special Commission of the CFTU. Our thanks are due to T. Duraisingam, a member of this Commission and one of the pioneers of the left movement in Ceylon, who took great pains in collecting the historical material and editing this brief history.

This history is published to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions.

M. G. Mendis

August 4, 1966.

FORWARD

Whatever rights that the workers enjoy today have not been given to them as gifts by an enlightened Government or by the good will of the employers but have been wrested by the working class itself through bitter struggles and sacrifices made by the workers and their leaders during the past four decades. Those who do not know of these earlier struggles, especially the younger generation, may think that all these rights have always been there.

In order that they may better prepare themselves for the further struggles that lie ahead to retain the rights already won and to win further rights, the present generation of workers should know about the struggles and sacrifices made by the earlier generations of workers.

The workers affiliated to the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions have during the last quarter of a century played an active part in fighting for the rights, the improvement of the living conditions and the wages of the working people. This short history of the CFTU and the working class movement must be read by all our members. It will be also useful to all those interested in the working class movement of Ceylon.

S. A. Wickramasinghe

Colombo, August 3, 1966.

THE C.F.T.U. AND THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

The workers in the factories, plantations and other work-places organised in trade unions at present affiliated to the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions have during the last quarter of a century played an active and important part in fighting for the rights, the improvement of the living conditions and better wages of the working people. They have also worked consistently for the development of the trade union movement in this country and for the national independence and social progress of Ceylon. Some of the leading members of the C.F.T.U. have been active since an earlier period in the political and trade union life of the country and some of them almost from the very inception of active trade unionism in Ceylon.

The Labour laws enacted during the first hundred years of British rule were intended to regulate the employment of the workers engaged in the construction of roads, bridges, railways, mines, domestic service and of Indian immigrant labour working in the plantations. These laws were generally weighted in favour of the employer and against the workers.

During and immediately after the First World War the cost of living rose steeply and essential goods were in short supply. Rice was rationed. The living conditions of the workers, which were always bad, became worse. There was general unrest in the country. The impact of the Great October Revolution of 1917, whereby the first Workers' State was formed in the Soviet Union, was felt throughout the world. Revolutionary movements were formed and became very active in several European countries. In colonial countries nationalist and workers' organisations, including trade unions were formed.

Agitation for Betterment of Workers

At that time in Ceylon there was no organisation of the workers to take up their cause and fight for their betterment. The earliest agitation in Ceylon for the betterment of the workers was by organisations of the upper and middle classes.

The Ceylon Workers' Welfare League, composed of employees, social workers and professional men, was inaugurated in 1919 to promote the interests of the working classes of Ceylon. The League, led by Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, got the Ceylon National Congress to adopt in 1919 a resolution demanding "that the labour

laws of the Island should be amended by the elimination of all provisions which do not fully recognise that Labour is a form of social service and that the labourer's well being is of greater importance than any material wealth; it asked for the abolition of criminal penalties and imprisonment for breaches of civil contracts of service, abolition of child labour, compulsory education of children, fixing of minimum remunerative wages by wage regulations, regulation of hours of labour, provision for rest and recreation, care of the *enceinte* mother and of infants, good working and living conditions, and recognition of the right of association of all workers." (Report of the Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation, 1951. p. 81. Speech by Peri Sunderam.)

The Ceylon Workers' Federation was also formed during this period and this organisation too, which was under the leadership of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, Martinus C. Perera and others, was a middle class organisation which agitated for the betterment of the workers. It was, however, not a federation of trade unions as the name would seem to imply.

Enter Goonesingha

The first association of workers as a trade union was formed in 1922. This was the Ceylon Labour Union inaugurated in Colombo on the 2nd September 1922 and founded by A. E. Goonesinha. For about a decade Goonesinha was the undisputed leader and champion of the urban working class movement. There were several important strikes between 1923 and 1930. A strike of railway workers which began in February 1923 spread to the harbour, the Wellawatte Weaving Mills, several engineering firms in Colombo and to the scavenging labourers of Colombo involving about 15,000 workers.

On the 26th October 1928 the All-Ceylon Trade Union Congress was inaugurated with a number of trade unions affiliated to it. At this Congress the following demands were put forward:- (a) the right of combination and legal recognition of trade unions, (b) workmen's compensation and the employer's liability for its payment (c) minimum wages, (d) regulation of hours of work, (e) arbitration courts, (f) old age pensions, (g) housing and rent restriction and (h) maternity benefits.

In 1928 there were strikes in printing establishments like the Colombo Apothecaries, Lake House, Cave & Company and the Times of Ceylon Ltd. To break the strike at Lake House the management brought in scab labour from South India.

In the year 1929 the Tramway workers went on strike and it was during this strike that the Maradana Police Station was set on fire. A. E. Goonesinha who led these and other strikes was accepted by the workers of Colombo as their champion. It was Goonesinha and his fellow trade unionists who for the first time showed the workers of Ceylon that their strength lay in unity and that they must fight for their rights. Workers both Ceylonese and those of Indian origin were, at that time, members of his union.

In 1931 the All-Ceylon Trade Union Congress struck work again at the *Times of Ceylon*. Following this strike the State Council enacted the Industrial Disputes (Conciliation) Ordinance in March 29, 1931, thereby providing a form of machinery for the settlement of industrial disputes which was also a brake on strikes by workers.

At this stage A. E. Goonesinha tried to adopt the methods of work of the British right-wing Labour leaders. He had been to the headquarters of the British Trade Union Congress in London and established connections with people like Ramsay Mac Donald. He now became a "respectable" trade unionist who took pride in having the Imperial Governors of Ceylon like Sir Reginald Stubbs, Sir Arthur Moore and Sir Herbert Stanley preside at functions connected with the annual sessions of the All Ceylon Trade Union Congress.

In June 1929 the Trade Union Congress entered into an agreement with the Employers' Federation of Ceylon by which the parties agreed to follow a defined procedure for the peaceful settlement of disputes. From being a militant and uncompromising leader of the working class Goonesinha changed over to become a "peaceful" settler of disputes with the employers. The hero of the tramway workers' strike in 1929 soon became a supplier of scab labour and, some years later, personally took part in sending scabs to man the trams in his efforts to break the tramway workers' strike led by the Colombo Municipal Workers' Union. The All Ceylon Trade Union Congress is now defunct.

Universal Adult Franchise

Before 1931 the franchise was extremely limited. The number of registered voters was only 4 per cent of the total population. Women had no vote.

The Legislative Council was the legislative body of that time. The British Governor had immense powers. A third of the membership of the Council consisted of official and nominated members. They had the sole power of voting on matters declared by the Governor to be of "paramount importance". The elected members had no vote in such matters. The elected members themselves were chosen by the privileged few who had the franchise.

With this legislative set up, it is no wonder that at that time there was no legal provisions for relieving destitution, no workmen's compensation, only the most elementary factory legislation, no minimum wages and no regulation of hours of work.

The Ceylonese capitalists and feudal land-owners carried on agitation against the then constitution and demanded more powers for themselves in the colonial set up.

The British Government sent to Ceylon, in 1927, the Donoughmore Commission to investigate into the working of the Constitution.

The bourgeois nationalist leaders of that time, giving evidence before the commission, demanded full responsible government under the British. But they were opposed to the extension of the franchise. They said that a person without the possession of property will not exercise his vote with a due sense of responsibility. They also said that "it would be unsafe to give the right to vote to the poor man as he was likely to sell it for 5 rupees or a bottle of toddy". The Ceylon National Congress and its leaders, D. B. Jayatilake and D. S. Senanayake, were opposed to the grant of universal adult franchise. The members of the Ceylon Labour Union and those who supported labour pressed for it.

Though, according to the new constitution, the elected members in the State Council were in the majority, yet the Governor and three Officers of State had the whip hand in all matters of importance. The three Officers of State were Englishmen and were in charge of finance, justice and the public services, which were called the "reserved subjects". Imperial control was maintained and Imperial interests were protected through these officers and through the use of the Governor's powers.

Despite these important limitations of the State Council, the fact that the members were elected by voters on the basis of universal adult franchise made the representatives to be receptive, to a certain extent, to the needs and wishes of the people. Whatever social legislation of any importance that has been enacted in Ceylon was enacted only after the people got their franchise.

The First Marxist

Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe was elected to the first State Council in 1931 as the member for Morawaka. In his student days in London he had to come into touch with the Left movement and was greatly influenced by the teachings of Karl Marx and by the practical

achievements of the first socialist state, the Soviet Union. After coming back to Ceylon in 1929, Dr. Wickremasinghe introduced the ideas of Socialism to his circle of friends and associates.

At the State Council he spoke about the deplorable conditions of the workers and peasants and the need for legislation to protect them. The voice of the working people began to be heard, for the first time, in the legislative assembly of the country. He made a scientific analysis of the causes for the poverty and backwardness of the Ceylonese people and exposed the true nature of colonial exploitation in Ceylon. He pointed out that the poverty and degradation of the people were directly due to the political and economic domination by British Imperialism.

Suriya Mal Movement

The great economic depression of the early thirties and the consequent unemployment and hardship suffered by the people made the radical sections of the intelligentsia think of alternatives to the capitalist system and a number of them found that the Marxist solution was the only way out. They were impressed by the achievements of the first socialist state, the USSR, which had been unaffected by the general crisis that had engulfed the capitalist world. The first few leftists began to group around the Suriya Mal Movement. The sale of Suriya Mal was originally started by a few Ceylonese ex-servicemen of the first World War as a protest against the proceeds of the poppy sales on November 11th being sent to England. They wanted the monies collected to be spent among the ex-servicemen and their dependants in Ceylon.

This idea of the sale of Suriya Mal on Poppy Day was taken over in 1933 by a group of Leftists and the Suriya Mal Movement functioned as an anti-imperialist organisation working for the upliftment of the people. The monies collected by the sale of Suriya Mal was utilised for social uplift work and also to print and publish booklets and leaflets exposing British Imperialism. During the malarial epidemic of 1934 the members of the Suriya Mal Movement collected monies from the public and helped the villagers, who suffered during this epidemic, by purchasing and distributing among them medicine and food.

Among the Leftists who were at that time in the Suriya Mal Movement were Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe, Dr. N. M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena, Dr. Colvin R. de Silva, Leslie Goonewardene, Terence N. de Zylva, M. G. Mendis, T. Duraisingam, B. J. Fernando and Reggie Senanayake. Mrs. Doreen Wickremasinghe was elected first President of the Suriya Mal Movement.

With the dawn of the 1930s the leftists began to form trade unions and to lead working class struggles. A. E. Goonesinha was soon ousted from his position as labour leader. The Wellawatte Mill workers were organised by the leftists. A strike was called out in 1933 and about 1400 workers were out on strike for nearly 6 months. The leftists at this time organised and led several other working class struggles such as the strikes at Vavasseurs' Coconut and Fibre Mills at Mirigama and Lunuwila and at the Colombo Commercial Co. Manure Workes at Hunupitiya, Kelaniya. The dockers' strike in Trincomalee was the first port strike led by the leftists.

Although these strikes were resisted by the Colonial Government and the employers, the stiffest opposition to most of the strikes in the industrial firms came from A. E. Goonesinha. He had entered into a pact with the employers to generally avoid strikes. However the wages and other conditions were so low at that time that the workers were compelled to rebel against these hard conditions and in this the leftists assisted and led them.

Goonesinha, as mentioned earlier, took the side of the employers and used force and blacklegs to break these strikes. He also split and weakened the working class movement by his campaign to arouse racial hatred against workers of Indian origin who, at that time, were employed in many work places in Colombo.

It was in this period that Goonesinha began to lose his prestige and influence in the working class movement as he helped the employers to break a number of strikes. The big employers helped him by collecting for him the membership dues of his trade union members. Further they gave employment only to workers who came with chits from Goonesinha's union and thereby gave his union a premium by which they tried to ensure a docile labour force.

In 1935 the Trade Unions Ordinance was promulgated. "Unlike in England in Ceylon registration is compulsory and the preamble to the Trade Unions Ordinance describes our Ordinance as one providing for the "Registration and control of trade unions"; so that in Ceylon any unregistered trade union would be an illegal association." (*Trade Unions and the Law* by. C. Navaratnarajah p. 16).

Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe took the lead in opposing the Trade Union Bill. He explained to his colleagues in the State Council the reactionary nature of the Bill and pointed out that there was no adequate protection for the workers but that the Bill was weighted all on the side of the employers. The main objections to this ordinance was against the provisions for compulsory registration of trade unions and against the restrictions on the use of trade union funds for political purposes. "If any trade union does not apply for regis-

tration in due time, or if the registration of any trade union is refused, withdrawn, or cancelled, then the trade union shall be deemed to be an unlawful association....." (*Trade Unions Ordinance*, Section 18.)

A number of members of the State Council, who did not earlier see the true nature of the Bill, subsequently joined Dr. Wickremasinghe in opposing it. He stated that "the provisions in this Bill which make the forming of trade unions unlawful and which place restrictions upon the expenditure of money which trade unions collect, alone make it clear that this Bill is not giving any rights to trade unions, but instead, rob them of their just rights." (*Hansard*, 1933, p. 2890).

A. E. Goonesinha who, at an earlier stage of the Bill had supported it, later opposed it and said that "from the year 1923, when we had the first general strike down to the present moment, the cry has been raised by the capitalist classes that there must be some means by which trade unions could be controlled, by which the Government could control trade unions.....Legislation was demanded year in and year out by the capitalist classes." (*Hansard* 1933. p. 2881.)

This Bill was opposed by all those who represented or supported labour. Among those who opposed it was S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. Despite this opposition it was passed and became law in 1935. This was the beginning of the struggle of the workers to win elementary trade union rights and benefits from a reactionary Government and unwilling employers.

Among the rights given to a trade union by this Ordinance was the right to acquire and to hold property and to sue and be sued in its registered name. It also gave trade unions the same legal protection in respect to liability for damages as in England.

Birth of LSSP

Another important event in this year for the trade union movement was that the leftists in the Suriya Mal Movement, who were up to now functioning in an unorganised way, formed themselves in December 1935 into a political party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. The members of the Party carried on a constant agitation for better living conditions and higher wages both among the industrial workers in and around Colombo and also among plantation workers. They stressed the need for united action by the workers to improve their living conditions and to obtain increased wages. The Sama Samajists held meetings at parks, open spaces, street corners and outside the estates and spoke in Sinhala

and in Tamil, unlike meetings held by other politicians of that time, which were invariably in English. Politics then was confined to the English educated few. It was the leftists who first popularised the use of Sinhala and Tamil at political meetings.

N. S. G. Kuruppu in his article on the "History of the Working Class Movement in Ceylon" points out that the year 1935 marks "the end of a period since it sees the mass of the working class movement being given a new direction by the advent of revolutionary Marxism". (*The Ceylon Historical Journal*, October 1951.)

The biggest transport strike in the history of the labour movement in Ceylon was the island-wide two-day protest strike, called in early 1936, of all motor transport workers such as bus workers, lorry workers and hiring and private car drivers. This strike which was led by the leftists was called to protest against the cancellation of driving licenses for the commission of trivial motor offences. The strike was so effective that the Government had to abandon the enforcement of this regulation. Among those who led this strike were Dr. Colvin R. de Silva, Dr. N. M. Perera, M. G. Mendis and J. C. T. Kotelawala. There were also several other bus strikes in Colombo of the employees in B. M. Rodrigo Bros. & Co., then the biggest bus company operating in Colombo and the suburbs.

In 1937 M. A. L. Bracegirdle, an Australian who came to Ceylon to learn planting, joined the members of the LSSP in agitating against the deplorable conditions of plantation labour. He addressed meetings of workers in the plantation areas. At the instance of the European community and the police the Governor made an order for the deportation of Bracegirdle and he was taken into custody. This order was purported to be made under an Order in Council of 1896.

This deportation order was opposed by almost all the members of the State Council as a violation of the Constitution and the Order in Council as a threat to the fundamental rights of the people. Only one elected member of the State Council, G. G. Ponnambalam, and the nominated members, most of them Englishmen, supported the action of the Governor. According to the interpretation of the Order in Council given by the then Governor, he could, without giving any reasons for it, deport anyone from Ceylon.

Mammoth public meetings were held condemning the action of the Governor. An application was also made to the Supreme Court against the Governor's order. The Court held that it was illegal and ordered the release of Bracegirdle. The agitation around the arrest of Bracegirdle, brought to the notice of the public the real conditions of the plantation workers and the attitude of the European community towards them.

In 1940 the majority in the Central Committee of the LSSP. came under the influence of Trotskyism. They expelled a number of leading members of the Party for opposing this major change in policy. Among those who were thus expelled were Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe, M. G. Mendis, Rev. U. Saranankara, A. Vaidialingam, W. Ariyaratne, T. Duraisingam, D. P. Yasodis and K. Ramanathan. These Communists formed the Colombo Workers' Club in early 1940. Its office was at 61 Hultsdorp Street and later at 37 Wilson Street, Colombo.

The Second World War

The outbreak of the war in September 1939 led to a rise in import prices and an increase in the cost of living, accompanied by unemployment. In his Administration Report for 1940 the Controller of Labour, F. C. Gimson, admitted that "certain business undertakings in Colombo discontinued some of their employees as a measure of economy on account of the war" and that in the districts "considerable unemployment was prevalent among the coir yarn workers consequent upon the loss of continental markets and shortage of freight due to the war".

The hardships caused by the rising cost of living was discussed in the State Council in November 1940 and a motion was passed "that in view of the increased cost of living occasioned by the war this house is of opinion that the wages of daily and hourly paid labourers and the salaries of Government Servants in receipt of Rs. 100 or less per month should be increased. (*Hansard*, 1940 p. 3037).

But in the private sector the rise in the cost of living did not lead to a corresponding increase in wages and consequently caused immense hardship to the workers. At that time there were very few properly organised trade unions to voice the grievances of the workers or to fight for them. The members of the Colombo Workers' Club advised and guided the workers to form effective trade unions.

The Colombo Workers' Club itself started in a small way with a small office at Hultsdorp. The first May Day Demonstration organised by the Club was in 1940 and the procession, which started near the office of the Club and went to the venue of the meeting at Price Park, consisted of about 15 participants. But, despite the then existing conditions, the 15 comrades had the courage to step out on to the streets, carrying red flags inscribed with the hammer and sickle and shouting slogans calling for united action of the working class and for national independence for the country. The confidence they showed in their cause and the correctness of their

call brought tens of thousand of workers to join them within the next three or four years. Less than 200 persons attended the May Day meeting at Price Park in 1943. But the May Day meeting held in the following years were attended by thousands and thousands of workers.

In an article entitled "Trade Unionism in Ceylon", M. G. Mendis stated that "the workers have, by their own experience, learnt that they must rely not on this or that "labour leader" but on their own strength and initiative.

"The workers are still confronted with the same task: building up a genuine trade union movement. It is only now that the workers are realising that it is by combination and combination alone that they can defend their own rights against the encroachments of capital. The war is radicalising the workers. Rise in prices, cuts in wages, threat of dismissal and the dislocation of trade and industry have made the wretched conditions of workers still worse.. All this has led to the formation of genuine trade unions." (*United Socialist*, 19th November 1940).

The first strike in the harbour in which the leaders of the Colombo Workers' Club participated was the spontaneous strike of the wharf labourers in 1940. The workers had come out on strike demanding 5 cents more on every bag handled by them. They gathered near the Khan Clock Tower and deputed M. G. Mendis and K. Ramanathan to negotiate on their behalf. The Controller of Labour refused to deal with Mendis and questioned his authority to represent the workers. He said that he was prepared to deal only with A. E. Goonesinha as the representative of harbour labour.

Then M.G. Mendis went back and asked the 1,500 strikers to go to the office of the Controller at the Secretariat. As the strikers filled the office and the corridors, the Controller changed his mind and himself went out to invite Mendis to negotiate a settlement. The employers were contacted and after some hard bargaining the workers got an increase of 3 cents per bag. The victorious workers marched to Price Park and held a meeting presided over by Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe. At that meeting it was decided to inaugurate the All Ceylon Harbour Workers' Union with Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe as President and M. G. Mendis and K. Ramathan as Joint Secretaries. This was the first Leftist union formed among the harbour workers. This Union was established on the 21st June 1940.

Trade Unions were also formed in most of the big factories in Colombo. The Colombo Workers' Club was also successful in starting the first trade unions among the workers of the large British tea and rubber packing factories in Colombo in 1940.

In the same year unions were formed among press and hotel workers, shop assistants and workers on unemployment relief schemes. There were as many as 35 unions organised according to companies by the end of 1940. These unions, each in isolation of the others, carried on their struggles for recognition of their unions and for concessions from the employers.

Some of the early trade unions established under the leadership of the Colombo Workers' Club were the B. C. C. Hulstorf Mill Labour Union founded on 8th November 1939, the All Ceylon Toddy Tappers' Union founded on 3rd December 1939, later amalgamated with the All Ceylon Toddy Workers' Union, and the All Ceylon Press Workers' Union founded on 5th December 1939.

Formation of CTUF

After nearly 12 months of struggle and experience the leaders and the advanced workers in these unions realised the need for a centralised leadership, for the co-ordination of their efforts and for the consolidation of the achievements already won in order to carry the struggle more effectively.

Accordingly, one afternoon in December 1940, these trade union leaders assembled in a dilapidated garage in Vauxhall Street in the working class area of Slave Island and decided to affiliate all the unions into one Federation. This decision was implemented on the night of the 22nd December 1940, when representatives from the then existing unions met at 211, Union Place, Colombo, and formally founded the Ceylon Trade Union Federation. At this meeting the delegates from the unions and the first office bearers of the CTUF were elected.

Among the comrades who took the initiative in organising the CTUF were M. G. Mendis, W. Ariyaratne, A. Vaidialingam, D. P. Yasodis, P. Sankar, Lionel Kulatunga, K. Ramanathan, T. W. Pedirishamy, P. Kandiah, and B. H. Pieris. Rev. U. Saranankara presided at the first meeting.

The 1940 constitution declared that the objects of the Ceylon Trade Union Federation were to "establish a fellowship among all workers", and to co-ordinate the work of the affiliated unions and give effective help to them "in their struggle for their rights and interests". The objects also included the protection of "the legitimate rights and privileges of the workers", obtaining redress for workers' grievances and the improvement of wages and conditions of work.

It was during this period that Pieter Keuneman came to Ceylon after completing his studies in England. He started taking an active part in organising the workers and fighting for their rights. He gained popularity among the workers and was repeatedly elected as President of the CTUF for many years.

The first May Day meeting of the CTUF was held in 1941, when resolutions were passed calling for a total prohibition of further immigrant labour from India, the granting of unemployment benefit, a war bonus to workers, an eight hour working day and a 50% reduction in rent.

The most important labour dispute that took place during the early years of the war was the strike of harbour workers in July 1941. The strike was led by the All Ceylon Harbour Workers' Union, the Ceylon Wharfage Company Workers' Union and the Cargo Boat Despatch Company Workers' Union.

Mrs. V. K. Jayawardena in her thesis *The Urban Labour Movement in Ceylon* describing this strike and the steps taken by the Government, stated that "the Governor called a conference of the Board of Ministers, at which it was decided that the Governor should use his powers under the Defence Regulations to declare all loading and transport and connected work in the ports of Ceylon to be "essential services".

"Three other means were used to bring the strike to an end. The Government appointed the Controller of Labour, F. C. Gimson to hold an immediate inquiry into the grievances of the harbour workers and their conditions of employment. Second, the employers made efforts to find alternative sources of labour. Workers were brought from Galle to fill the places of strikers, and Goonesinha's Ceylon Labour Union agreed to supply workers for the harbour. Third, under the Defence Regulations, the CTUF Secretary, M. G. Mendis, who had played an active part in the harbour strike was arrested, on charges of inciting workers to strike.

"The strike ended after nine days when the Union accepted the Government's offer of a Commission of Inquiry by the Controller of Labour and an interim award within a few days. The Controller's interim report clearly brought out the urgent need for an all-round increase in wages.

"But on 23rd October 1941, a lightning strike of harbour workers took place when it was rumoured that the final Report of the Commission of Inquiry, which recommended higher wages for harbour

workers, would not be published or put into effect, because by that date the Commissioner (F. C. Gimson) had left Ceylon. All work in the harbour came to a stand-still when the workers came out on strike. The CTUF took the initiative in the renewal of the strike and issued leaflets stating: "We cannot be patient any longer, we have got a splendid opportunity; let us avail ourselves of it. Workers, do not come to work today."

"The strike was illegal as the harbour had been declared an "essential service" in July 1941, and eight CTUF leaders (including M. G. Mendis, K. Madavan, K. Edwin and Lionel Kulatunga) were arrested and charged with inciting workers to strike.

"The Government decided to publish the Gimson Report immediately and thereby secure a return to work by the strikers. The strike was called off on 27th November after the workers had been assured that the Report would be implemented.

"The employers resisted the minimum wage recommendations (Rs. 30 for a married man and Rs. 25 for a bachelor per month) and the 25% increase of wages to workers on coal cargo. The Governor, finding that the employers "refused to accept voluntarily certain vital recommendations" used his authority under the Defence Regulations to declare particular services in the harbour to be "essential work" which made it obligatory for the employers to accept the decisions of Commissions appointed by the Government.

"The Harbour strike was a major victory for the CTUF and represented the first important trade union success in Ceylon since the 1920s.

During the first two years of the founding of the CTUF, factory unions were formed and affiliated to it. But just as the workers organised in separate factory unions soon realised the need for a Federation, so now workers engaged in separate factories but in the same trade realised the need for greater unity and a common organisation to fight for their common demands. The following period saw the growth and development of industrial trade unions, organised on the principle of one union for one trade.

Acting on this principle the CTUF took steps to amalgamate all factory unions functioning within the same trade and thus formed a single union for every trade. It was during this period that the All Ceylon Tea and Rubber Workers' Union, The All Ceylon Toddy Workers' Union, The United Engineering Workers' Union, The Colombo Harbour Workers' Union and The Ceylon General Workers' Union were formed. This method of trade union organisation initiated by us was later followed by the rest of the trade union movement.

The years of the Second World War were not easy for the trade union movement. Under the British-imposed Defence Regulations strikes were banned, working class parties made illegal and democratic and trade union rights severely restricted. At the same time, the cost of living was rising steeply.

The CTUF pursued a skilful policy in which illegal strikes, legal forms of pressure and the use of the Defence Regulations themselves were combined to gain advances for the workers. Concentrating on a factory where it was very strong, a Union would wrest concessions from the employer. It would then use the provisions of the Avoidance of Strikes and Lockouts Ordinance to win the same concessions for the rest of the industry.

In this way the engineering workers and the tea and rubber workers won wage increases, increased dearness allowances (then called War Bonus), medical leave and a number of other benefits.

We also led a continuous agitation for the establishment of Wages Boards which at that stage represented a big step forward for the workers. This agitation was successful, and the first Wages Board was established in 1944. Through this Wages Board, a number of concessions to improve the workers' conditions were won.

By these methods the unions affiliated to the CTUF won such conditions as 14 days annual leave, 7 paid public holidays, free mid-day meals, free teas, medical leave, payment of gratuities or retirement pay, a six day week and eight-hour day, time and a half for overtime as well as substantial increases in pay and allowances. A great deal of the credit for this good work must go to A. Vaidialingam, the then General Secretary of the CTUF.

The May Day celebrations of 1944 were held on a grand scale. Workers came in their thousands to the Galle Face Green, the venue of the Rally, carrying posters and shouting slogans in their processions and expressed their solidarity, their class consciousness and their unity. For the first time in the history of the working class movement in Ceylon the CTUF unions were strong enough to get the employers to close down the factories to enable the workers to attend their May Day celebrations.

The CTUF at the general body meeting of delegates held on the 28th of October 1944, adopted a new constitution. The new constitution declared the aims of the CTUF as those of winning freedom, ensuring popular democracy and establishing a socialist Ceylon. It also contained a charter of working class aims and demands.

On the basis of the new constitution a special session of the CTUF was held during January 5-7, 1945 at "Freedom City", Price Park, Colombo. It was attended by fraternal delegates from India. The sessions were organised on a big scale with several exhibitions—the Soviet Exhibition organised by the Ceylon Friends of the Soviet Union, in particular, drawing tremendous crowds and creating much interest. These sessions saw the greatest mobilisation of the working class in Ceylon up till then and helped to raise the prestige of the CTUF on a national level. The final rally was attended by well over 25,000 and was preceded by a mammoth demonstration.

The CTUF also paid due attention to the political aspirations of the working class for freedom and socialism. At that time the Soulbury Commission was in Ceylon and the CTUF held a big rally at the Colombo Town Hall, demanding full independence for the country. The rally was preceded by a big demonstration.

In her book *World Labour Comes of Age* Betty Wallace, a British trade unionist, wrote in 1945 that our Federation was "undoubtedly the largest and most active mass organisation in Ceylon." Referring to other trade union organisations at that time she wrote: "There are two other small groupings in Ceylon. The All Ceylon Trade Union Congress, which has been largely inactive since 1939. The Ceylon Indian Congress Labour Union is open only to Indian workers and confines its activities to plantations where immigrant Indian labour predominates."

Post-War Developments

With the cessation of hostilities and military expenditure, the problem of unemployment became a serious one. The employers started their offensive and withdrew benefits that were earlier forced out of them. With the repeal of the Defence Regulations the findings of the Special Tribunals were no longer legally binding. Retrenchment of workers began and even workers kept in employment were not given full-time employment.

The CTUF demanded a solution of the unemployment problem and organised a demonstration of Colombo workers who carried a memorandum outlining the urgent problems of the working people for consideration by the Board of Ministers. The demonstration which numbered nearly 30,000 was however prevented from marching to the State Council. Nor were the Ministers prepared to meet the demonstration.

As a mark of protest, we called on the workers in Colombo to declare a half-day token strike. Thousands of workers obeyed the call on the 19th September 1945. The Strike passed off without

incident except in the tramways. Here, on the orders of A. E. Goonesinha, Chairman of the Municipal Tramways Committee, three of the leading tramway men were dismissed for taking part in the strike.

The tramway men went on strike in support of their colleagues. Goonesinha brought in blacklegs and obtained police protection to run the trams. The workers in the other unions came out in sympathy strike and it developed into a general strike. The women workers of the All-Ceylon Tea & Rubber Workers Union played a prominent part in this strike. Ultimately the Municipality was forced to retreat and reinstate the three men.

Women workers, especially those in the tea and rubber packing industries in Colombo, have contributed their share to the development of the working class movement. They have participated fully in the militant struggles of their fellow workers and for the workers' cause they have endured hardships, dismissals and even terms of imprisonment as in the case of E. A. Ponsinahamy and others. The demand of women workers that there should be no discrimination against them and that the principle of equal pay for equal work be granted, irrespective of sex or age, is a just demand and we have always supported it.

The years 1945-1946 saw the worsening of the economic crisis that set in with the end of the war. The total real earnings of the workers dropped as a result of the lack of overtime work and rise in the cost of living thus making living conditions intolerable for them.

The first notable strike in this period was the strike of the Colombo harbour workers in April-May 1946 led by the CTUF. It brought the workers face to face with the reactionary and pro-employer nature of the government personified by the then Minister of Communication and Works, Sir John Kotelawala. The strike was crushed with brute force and as a result of which about 30 strikers had to serve varying terms of imprisonment, among whom were M. G. Mendis and Harry Abeyagunawardena.

The next important strike was that of the bank clerks who fought against victimisation in October 1946. Although the strike was organised by the Bank Clerks' Union under the leadership of A. E. Goonesinha, we of the CTUF extended our fullest co-operation to the strikers, including financial assistance.

It must be noted here that the co-operation and assistance given by the workers to the bank clerks was symbolic of the growing unity of the workers by hand and brain. This unity was also expressed in the decision of the Ceylon Sstate Etaffs' Union to affiliate to the CTUF.

The unrest against intolerable conditions of living was not confined to workers under private employment. The government employees were also affected and joined in the general movement for better conditions. They were, in addition, suffering from lack of trade union and political rights.

We have always supported the demand of government employees for full trade union and political rights. The fifth sessions of the CTUF in September 1946 passed the following resolution:

“The sessions reiterates its demand for full trade union rights for all government employees. It draws the attention of the Ceylon Government to the fact that the British Labour Government has withdrawn all the restrictions imposed on the trade union of Government employees. It urges the Ceylon Government to accord full union rights to all its employees by hand or brain.”

The Government employees were thus suffering from a dual grievance. The first major strike of these sections was the strike of Government daily paid employees on November 1946. This strike received our unstinted support. The strike was a huge success and the Government climbed down and granted a number of demands. But it refused to grant government employees full trade union and political rights.

The ranks of the daily paid government employees were swelled by the drawing together into the movement of the monthly paid employees who had been badly hit during the war as a result of the rise in prices and had received no wage increase. They also suffered from lack of full trade union and political rights.

Thus the discontent and unrest against impossible conditions of living and lack of ordinary civil rights among all sections of employees, whether under private employment or government, gathered momentum and led in the next year to the historic general strike of May-June 1947.

The strike started with a dispute at Rowlands Garage over the period of payment of wages which led to a strike in that establishment. About the same time, the workers at Holland Colombo Trading Co. Ltd. came out on strike demanding six days' work in the week. The Government refused to intervene to settle the disputes; though later this did not prevent it from intervening on the side of the employers to break the strike.

Sensing the preparedness of the workers to fight back the offensive of the employers, we decided to meet the counter-offensive of the employers by putting forward the demands of workers for higher wages. The All Ceylon Tea and Rubber Workers' Union, the United Engineering Workers' Union and other affiliated unions of the CTUF put forward demands for a 25% increase in wages, six days' work in the week and trade union and political rights for government employees; and on the rejection of these demands by the employers the workers came out on strike.

These workers were later joined by the workers of the Ceylon Federation of Labour. At this juncture, the Government suspended some of the leading members of the Government Clerical Service Union, including its President, T. B. Illangaratne, for leading the agitation for trade union and political rights for Government employees. This brought the government clerks, for the first time in their history, to join the strike. The daily paid employees followed suit. The majority of the members of the Ceylon Mercantile Union, which was at that time led by A. E. Goonesinha, also wanted to join the strike, but this was prevented by Goonesinha and it was one of the reasons that led to the breaking away of the Ceylon Mercantile Union from his influence.

The general strike was the biggest strike ever organised in Ceylon up till that time. At its peak it involved about 50,000 workers drawn from the Ceylon Trade Union Federation, the Ceylon Federation of Labour and the Government Worker's Trade Union Federation. Leaders like Pieter Keuneman, Dr. N. M. Perera, K. P. Silva M. G. Mendis and others played a notable part in leading this strike and fighting back the repression of the Colonial Government.

The Government on its part, was bent on crushing the strike. The entire capitalist press misrepresented and slandered the strikers, the unions and their leaders. The Ceylon defence Force was called out and the British Royal Marines paraded the streets of Colombo. On June 5, the Police fired on an unarmed demonstration-killing V. Kandasamy of the GCSU who thus joined the list of martyrs of the working class movement.

In addition, the government rushed through the State Council several repressive laws like the Public Security Ordinance and the Police (Amendment) Ordinance which gave wide powers to the Police and the Governor. The Police (Amendment) Ordinance is still operative and the use of slogans and megaphones in demonstrations can be banned by the police. The use of loudspeakers at public meetings can be prohibited. Prior permission has to be obtained for taking out demonstrations and for the use of loudspeakers.

The insufficiently organised workers and the middle class employees could not withstand the organised might of the Government and the employers. The public servants began to trickle back to work and *were followed by those sections of the workers* who had harboured illusions about an easy victory. The strike was called off in the third week of June although none of the strikers' demands were met.

Having broken the strike, the government and the employers wanted to crush the trade union movement. They let loose a reign of repression and terror. Wages were cut, seniority allowances were scrapped, militant workers were discharged wholesale. The movement suffered a serious setback from which it took several years to recover.

The militancy and the unity in action of the workers by hand and brain, both in the public and private sectors shown in this strike was one of the decisive factors in bringing the end of Ceylon's colonial status in 1948. The British preferred to "hand over" "Independence" to their own class friends among the Ceylonese before real Independence was wrested from them by the people. So long as their class friends were at the helm of the State the British Companies were assured of their investments and their profits. This is how D. S. Senanayake and his friends were able to obtain "Freedom" for Ceylon without any struggle on their part.

One of the direct consequences of the general strike was the enactment of the Trade Union (Amendment) Act, No. 15, of 1948. This Act, while providing the right to associations of Government employees to register themselves as trade unions, prevents them from federating among themselves, affiliating to outside organisations, and from having political objects with a political fund. Even this limited right to form their own trade unions is not granted to the Police and Prison Department employees.

The experiences of the general strike showed the necessity to bring about trade union unity. On the proposal of the Ceylon Estate Staffs' Union a conference of all major trade unions was convened. At that conference there was general agreement on the need to have a united trade union movement. A committee was elected to discuss the details and to summon a conference of all trade unions for the purpose of forming a central trade union organisation. The conference met on July 30, 1948 but failed to reach agreement.

Estate Workers

During the last century and the early part of this century the conditions of Indian Immigrant Labour were deplorable. In 1916 Sir P. Arunachalam describing the immigrant labour system said that "there is a labour system which in some of its aspects is a little better than an organised slavery, though it lurks under the name of free labour...Cases have occurred where even women were repeatedly sent to gaol for refusing to go back to their employer on the estate, and where a labourer's remonstrance as to insufficient pay or erroneous pay has been punished as insolence, with imprisonment." *Indo-Ceylon Crisis* pp. 114 and 115.)

By about the late 1920s or early 1930s an Indian journalist and author, K. Natesa Aiyar, who was a member of both the Legislative Council and the State Council set up the All-Ceylon Indian Estate Labourers' Federation to work for the betterment of the conditions of Indian immigrant labour. Later he organised the Ceylon Indian Workers' Federation. By his pamphlets, writings and speeches he carried on a ceaseless agitation exposing the conditions of estate labour. Consequent to his agitation and that of leaders like Sir P. Arunachalam and Peri Sundaram, certain laws were enacted which gave some measure of relief to the estate labourers.

But before 1940 plantation labour was not properly organised. At that time whenever immigrant labourers showed any interest in forming trade unions the plantation employers could send them back to India. It was after 1940 when India banned immigration of labour to Ceylon that the planters lost this right. The All-Ceylon Estate Workers' Union, under the leadership of the pre-war LSSP, was formed on the 29th October 1939 and the Ceylon Indian Congress Labour Union on the 2nd June 1940. Natesa Aiyar's Ceylon Indian Workers' Federation which was formed on 2nd October, 1939, was in existence for some time but later faded out. Though trade unions were legally recognised the planters were unwilling to recognise or to negotiate with these trade unions and prevented these unions from organising estate labour and forming branch unions in the various estates.

The All Ceylon Estate Workers' Union, whose leaders were members of the pre-war Lanka Sama Samaja Party, broadened its influence and work in the plantations. In this work the Tamil weekly organ of the Party, which was edited by K. Ramanathan, did yeoman service. In the course of a strike organised by this union at Mooloya Estate, Govindan a worker, was shot dead by

the police. Govindan was the first martyr who gave up his life for the working class of Ceylon. The union organised many other struggles in Badulla, Matale and Kandy districts. Famous among these were the Wewessa, Ramboda and Pundaluoya strikes.

As a consequence of these struggles a significant development in the industrial relations on the estates took place in 1940 when the Planters' Association and the trade unions entered into an agreement called the "Seven Point Agreement" which provided a procedure for settlement of disputes. The adoption of this agreement was responsible for the gradual reduction in the number of strikes in the plantations in the years that followed. Many disputes which would otherwise have ended in a strike were settled at a conference. But although the Seven Point Agreement was there, the employers were still reluctant to recognise the Trade Unions.

Soon after we formed the CTUF we realised the need of organising effectively the plantation workers to fight for their economic and political demands. The various district estate workers' unions that were affiliated to our Federation were amalgamated in October 29, 1944, to form the Ceylon Plantation Workers' Union (CPWU) which steadily grew in membership.

By 1946 the Ceylon Estate Employers Federation had repudiated the "Seven Point Agreement" and in 1948, the estate employers tried to pass the burden of the post-war crisis onto the shoulders of the workers by large scale retrenchment and increase of task to the workers left behind. The CPWU led the agitation against this offensive of the employers. In this connection, the strikes of the workers at Gasnawa, Edurugalla, Parambe, etc., will stand out as examples of the heroic manner in which workers will stand up, even against great odds, and fight when their interests are threatened.

The government came down on the side of the employers and on 1-7-49 removed the Rubber growing and manufacturing trade from the operation of the Wages Board, thus leaving the rubber workers at the mercy of the employers without a legal minimum wage.

The CPWU took the lead in calling a conference of other unions and put forward the proposal of a token strike against the decision of the government. Accordingly, the rubber workers on July 15th, and the tea and rubber workers on July 22nd came out on one day protest strike. The CICLU and certain other minor unions also participated in these strikes. Altogether nearly three lakhs of workers took part.

The other unions would not agree to a further intensification of this campaign. But nevertheless, the CPWU carried out two more one-day protest strikes on September 22nd and October 6th. These strikes were to produce results in early 1950 when the Government re-introduced the Wages Board.

When the U. S. monopolies were buying rubber at 45 cents a pound, there was a serious crisis in the rubber industry. Many rubber estates closed down, wages of workers were cut, and the Minister of Labour threatened to abolish the Rubber Wages Board. The CTUF together with other progressive forces demanded the selling of rubber to the Soviet Union and to China and to buy Chinese rice. Our agitation was so strong that the reactionary UNP Government was compelled to sign a rice-rubber agreement with China and our rubber industry was thus saved.

The rapid growth of the Ceylon Plantation Workers' Union made the planters decide to crush it by refusing to recognise it. On the pretext that a strike was called by the Union without proper notice, the Ceylon Estate Employers' Federation withdrew recognition of the Union in May 1950. Protracted correspondence with the Federation to induce them to grant recognition failed. The Federation and their members refused to have any dealings with the CPWU. This had an adverse effect on the Union and the membership declined.

Following this action of the Ceylon Estate Employers' Federation, the Employers' Federation of Ceylon, whose members are the big firms of Colombo, refused official recognition to the CTUF on the grounds that it was "Communist-led". They too hoped to smash our unions. But the union continued to grow, protected their members and won demands from the employers. Nevertheless it was not until after one year after Bandaranaike's Government was formed in 1956 that the employers' federations were finally forced officially to recognise the CTUF once again.

One of the main weapons of the employers to crush powerful trade unions is to deny recognition to the militant union and to recognise and patronise a rival union. The lack of unity among trade union organisations and the absence of one trade union centre were the main weapons of the employers to crush the working class movement.

Social Security

We took a prominent part in the great campaign for the defence, improvement and extension of social insurance and social security initiated by the World Federation of Trade Unions in 1953.

Prior to the International Conference convened by the WFTU in Vienna, in March 1953, the CTUF, together with other trade unions and individuals interested in social welfare, convened a National Conference on Social Security and Social Insurance on February 22nd, 1953 at the Polytechnic Institute, Colombo.

This Conference adopted a comprehensive scheme of Social Insurance which could be forthwith implemented even with the limited resources of the Government. A committee, with the late Dr. Kumaran Ratnam as chairman, was appointed to popularise the scheme among the working people. The scheme was forwarded to the Government but it did nothing about it.

The Hartal And After

Dudley Senanayake became the Prime Minister on the death of his father, D. S. Senanayake, in March 1952. In the subsequent general election, in May 1952, he was returned to power. And then came the great Hartal in August 1953. This Hartal was an important turning point in the political life of the working class and the people of this country. The UNP revealed its anti-working class and anti-people character by abolishing the rice subsidy and by taking other similar measures on the advice of the World Bank.

We played a great part in organising the historic Hartal of August 12th, 1953. Our Federation was the first to convene a joint meeting of trade unions to discuss a plan of action against the decision of the Government to remove the subsidy on rice, increase the postal rates and railway fares, and stop the free midday meal to school children. It was we who proposed the one-day General Strike and Hartal on August 12th.

At the call of the CTUF, other trade unions and Left parties, 75,000 workers in railways, postal services, harbour, transport, shops, tea and rubber stores, engineering firms, gas and textile factories, local bodies, etc. participated in the General Strike. Almost all establishments in Colombo were closed on the day of the Hartal.

Once again leaders of our Federation like Pieter Keuneman, M. G. Mendis and others were among the foremost leaders of this great struggle.

The Government declared a state of emergency and a curfew was ordered for a month. Ten people laid down their lives during the Hartal. Thousands were arrested and many hundreds were beaten up by the military and the police. The Hartal had far reaching political repercussions. Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake gave

up the premiership and went into temporary retirement. The utter defeat of the UNP in the 1956 General Elections was also, in the main, a consequence of the Hartal and the General Strike.

Among the important strikes that took place in this year was the plantation workers' strike against wage cuts. This strike, the biggest in the history of the trade union movement in Ceylon upto that time, took place on January 7th 1953 against the decision of the Tea Growing Wages Board to cut the wages of the workers. The call for the General Strike in the tea and rubber plantations was issued jointly by the CTUF, C W E and the CFL. The strike was so effective that the Board had to withdraw the wagecut.

One of the most sensational strikes was undoubtedly that of the employees of the South Western Bus Co., which was the biggest bus company in Ceylon. The strike, which took place in March 1955, paralysed transport on the vital line from Colombo all the way down to Galle. But the strike had not been well prepared. It had arisen spontaneously. On the other hand, the strike was opposed by the entire repressive machinery of the State. The pro-employer UNP Government threw its entire weight on the side of its chief supporters - the bus mudalalies. The Labour Department was reduced to impotence. The strike failed, but it will always stand out as a glorious episode in working class history and a tribute to the militant leadership of our Federation.

This strike may be said to have paved the way for the nationalisation of the bus services. At a public meeting held in support of the strike at the Colombo Town Hall, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike the then Leader of the Opposition, gave the promise that, if returned to power, he would nationalise the bus services. The buses were nationalised in 1957 after he became Prime Minister. The workers dismissed during the strike were also re-instated.

One of the acknowledged forms of strike action is the stay-in-strike and this form too was adopted during this strike. Soon after this strike ended the UNP Government brought in legislation to penalise any one taking part in a stay-in-strike. The Stay-in-Strike Act, No. 12 of 1955, was enacted to prevent persons who took part in a strike in any industry, trade, business, manufacture or agriculture from remaining in furtherance of that strike, in the premises in which that industry, trade, business, manufacture or agriculture was carried on. Every person found guilty of participating in a stay-in-strike was liable to three months imprisonment or fine, or both imprisonment and fine. Under this Act, hundreds of workers were charged in the Courts for having participated in stay-in-strikes. After the Bandaranaike Government came into power this repressive law was repealed by Act No. 23 of 1958.

The Post 1956 Period

Another important strike that was to have repercussions in the whole working class movement was the one at Brooke Bonds in November 1956. For years workers had been demanding some form of pensions or provident fund, but in vain. The workers at Brooke Bonds put this forward as their main demand and struck work. It lasted a week and at the end of that period at a conference, at which five Ministers of the Government participated, the employers agreed to grant a provident fund scheme.

As a result of the success of this strike, most of the employers in the tea and rubber export trade agreed to grant provident fund schemes to their workers. This same demand has also been won by the United Engineering Workers' Union for the engineering workers, following the strikes at Brown's, Lanka Garage and at Walker Sons. & Co., Ltd.

Since the coming to power of the Bandaranaike Government in 1956, arbitration machinery, especially the Industrial Court and Labour Tribunals, was more extensively used by the trade union movement.

The Industrial Disputes Act, which provides for investigation and settlement of industrial disputes, was passed in 1950 and came into operation in 1951. The Act provided for the registration of collective agreements, and established machinery for the settlement of disputes by conciliation, voluntary arbitration and by compulsory arbitration. The UNP Government, which was then in power, passed this Act to prevent or restrict strikes in the major industries. At the time which this act was enacted we characterised it as an attempt "to create a class of trade unions which are completely reformist and would abjure the path of militant trade unionism. Although there were certain provisions in the Act which could be used by trade unions in cases of dismissal of workers and to wrest certain concessions for them, the unions found that, in actual practice, it was difficult to get Government machinery in motion to obtain redress."

After the Bandaranaike Government came into power the same Act was also used to give relief to the workers. The Act was amended by the Industrial Disputes (Amendment) Act, No. 62 of 1957 and thereby provision was made for the establishment of Labour Tribunals. Though the Labour Tribunals as presently constituted are ill-fitted to obtain for the workers full justice, they have brought undoubted relief to a large number of workers, especially in individual cases of victimisation, who would otherwise have had to accept, without redress, their unjust dismissals or other punishments.

These Industrial Courts and Tribunals also had a negative effect on the trade union movement, about which we had warned the movement. In certain cases it led officials of trade unions to rely mainly on these Tribunals, to become in effect trade union "lawyers" and spend most of their time appearing before Industrial Courts and Tribunals, and neglecting mass trade union work.

The Employees Provident Fund is another important contribution made by the Bandaranaike Government for the welfare of the workers. Now the workers will not become helpless and destitute when they became old and unable to earn their living. They can depend on their Provident Fund.

One of our most important achievements in the post 1956-era is the successful struggle we conducted for the payment of the Government rate of dearness allowance to workers in the private sector. This won very big increases in pay for all the workers in several industries - including the workers in other unions or in no union at all.

We launched this struggle in October 1957 and this led to the historic strike of April 1958. The strike was unprecedented for its solidarity in face of brutal police attack and was one of Ceylon's biggest strikes. It was called off because of the outbreak of communal disturbances.

But it was not defeated. When conditions became settled, negotiations took place and we were able to announce on May Day 1959, that we had won the demand for the government rate of D. A. This meant for some categories of workers an increase of Rs. 40/- per month or more.

In this struggle we also wrested another important concession from the Employers' Federation. For the first time the Employers' Federation signed an official agreement with a trade union federation - a degree of recognition that had never before been won by a trade union centre. This victory also benefitted the other unions. They too signed agreements with employers which gave them the increased pay and the official recognition won for them by our Federation.

Public Service Trade Unions

The All-Island Conference of Public Service Trade Unions developed into the Public Service Workers' Trade Union Federation (PSWTUF) in 1957. The "35 demands" drawn up by the former organisation were pursued by the PSWTUF and many concessions were won in negotiations with the Bandaranaike Government.

All those dismissed in the 1947 strike were taken back, May Day was declared a public holiday and facilities were provided for the easier functioning of public service trade unions.

However, as time passed the Government's attitude towards the trade unions became stiffer and it resulted in the 1958 strike of public servants. Over 45,000 public servants participated in this strike which lasted 13 days. The Government called out the military and resorted to repressive measure to break the strike.

The then Government, proposing to amend the law in this respect, allowed the public service trade unions to form federations in spite of section 21(i)(b) of the Trade Unions Ordinance which prohibited such federations. Again, proposing to amend the law to grant political rights to public servants, the Government permitted them to openly take part in election campaigns, etc.

Though the teachers were an influential section of the salaried employees, they did not have a strong organisation to fight for the demands up to 1956. With the take over of aided schools by the Sirimavo Bandaranaike Government, in 1960, it became possible for the two largest unions, the Sri Lanka Rajaya Guru Sangamaya and the Lanka Jatika Guru Sangamaya, the former in the state sector and the latter in the private sector, to amalgamate and form a single union for all teachers in the Island. This union, the Sri Lanka Jatika Guru Sangamaya (the National Teachers' Union), formed in 1962, has developed into a powerful union working in close collaboration with the rest of the trade union movement and is associated in the Joint Committee of Trade Unions.

The C. C. T. U. Strike

The year 1959 was a crucial year for our nation. Reactionary forces in the country were planning to destroy the Bandaranaike regime and bring the UNP back to power. Certain forces within the trade union movement, led by S. Thondaman, were also planning for an onslaught on the Government. In these circumstances S. W.R.D. Bandaranaike, instead of relying on the progressive forces and the working class to meet this challenge, introduced certain amendments to the Public Security Ordinance.

A number of trade unions headed by the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), Ceylon Federation of Labour (CFL), Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU), and the Democratic Workers Congress (DWC) formed themselves into a joint committee which later became the Co-ordinating Committee of Trade Unions (CCTU) to struggle against the amendments to the Public Security Ordinance.

The CTUF led by the present leaders of the CFTU warned the Government against these proposed repressive amendments. But at the same time it warned the trade union movement about the serious situation developing in the country, where the reactionaries were planning the overthrow of the Bandaranaike Government.

The CCTU planned a general strike for March 3rd, 1959, against the proposed amendment. But the CTUF did not participate in this general strike.

The strike was a thorough failure as the majority of the trade unions refused to participate in a struggle which would benefit the enemies of the country, to the detriment of the progressive forces. Our warning proved to be correct. The Co-ordinating Committee of Trade Unions died a natural death in the confusion that followed.

In May 1959 the right-wing had staged a successful 'Cabinet Strike' and made S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike their 'prisoner' in this cabinet and in September 1959 he was assassinated.

The C.T.B. Strike

An Island-wide strike of the employees of the Ceylon Transport Board took place in December 1961. The strike was in protest over the dismissal of a worker under Circular No. 41, issued by the CTB. The strike originated at the Ratmalana Depot of the CTB and soon became an Island-wide strike which completely paralysed the bus service. The strike ended in complete success. The chairman and members of the Board were removed, the workman reinstated and the offending circular withdrawn.

In the same month, the harbour workers struck work demanding the implementation of the report of the P. O. Fernando Commission, which had been appointed by Bandaranaike. The Government refused to implement it and used the army for unloading purposes in the harbour. The use of the army and the police to break the strike was opposed by the entire trade union movement. At this time the Ceylon Bank Employees' Union went on strike for their own demands. All banking activities were paralysed.

The whole trade union movement decided to have a one day token general strike in support of the harbour and bank strikes. It was at this stage that news came of the attempted *coup d'etat* by reactionary officers in the Police and the Armed Services. The reactionary forces wanted to make use of the state of industrial unrest prevalent in the country to overthrow Sirimavo Bandaranaike's Government and seize power. In this situation most of the trade unions favoured a return to work in the harbour. The strike was called off after 55 days of heroic struggle.

The Bank clerks carried on their strike for three months despite the declaration of a state of emergency and eventually had to call it off without having won their demands.

This action of calling off the strike by the trade unions proved that the working class is the most patriotic class in society, prepared to subordinate its sectional interests to the greater interests of the nation.

The working class came out in defence of Sirimavo Bandaranaike's Government and pledged their full support and co-operation to smash the traitors who attempted the *coup d'état*

The CTB strike of January 1963 was carried on with great militancy and heroism for 17 days. It is unfortunate that during the progress of this strike N. Sanmugathasan, who had begun to push his splitting line more openly in the CTUF, went about maligning the acknowledged leaders of the Left movement and thereby demoralising the workers. Though the strikers had to return to work without having won their demands, some of the 9 demands for which the strike took place were granted by the Coalition Government in 1964.

Splitters at Work

The CTB strike highlighted a serious state of affairs that had been developing in the leadership of the CTUF for some time. It revealed a dangerous line that some of its officials had begun to pursue contrary to the traditions and interests of the CTUF and its members.

During a period of 9 months from September 1962 when comrade M. G. Mendis, President of the CTUF, was away from the Island the affairs of the Federation were in the hands of the then General Secretary, N. Sanmugathasan. During this period he abused his position to transform the CTUF into his individual platform and to oppose it to the Communist Party and the Left and Progressive movement. This line was pursued without the knowledge of the mass of the members and operated through a bureaucratic set-up which he had developed in the CTUF headquarters and in the leadership of some affiliated unions.

On top of this, Sanmugathasan and his supporters converted the two CTUF newspapers, *Ramkaruwa* and *Tholilali*, into their own organs in which Communist and other Left leaders were slandered and attacked and a cult of the personality of Sanmugathasan openly fostered.

Also, without any authority from the general membership, the CTUF headquarters were used by Sanmugathasan to hold lectures and so-called "study-classes" in which the Soviet Union and other socialist countries were openly maligned and slandered.

Though many attempts were made to persuade Sanmugathasan to give up the disastrous policy on which he had embarked especially since the return to Ceylon of M. G. Mendis in May 1963, he was adamant and refused to give up his suicidal policy. Matters came to a head in October 1963 when he openly announced that he would organise the "militants" of the CTUF in order to fight the Communist Party.

As the facts of the situation inside the CTUF became known, a rank-and-file movement of protest began to mount against Sanmugathasan in the affiliated unions. Sanmugathasan and his henchmen resorted to the most undemocratic methods to suppress this rising protest of the workers. At the same time they began to rig the representation of delegates at the 16th sessions of the CTUF which was to take place soon, to handpick delegates and to prevent the feelings of the rank-and-file workers from being freely expressed.

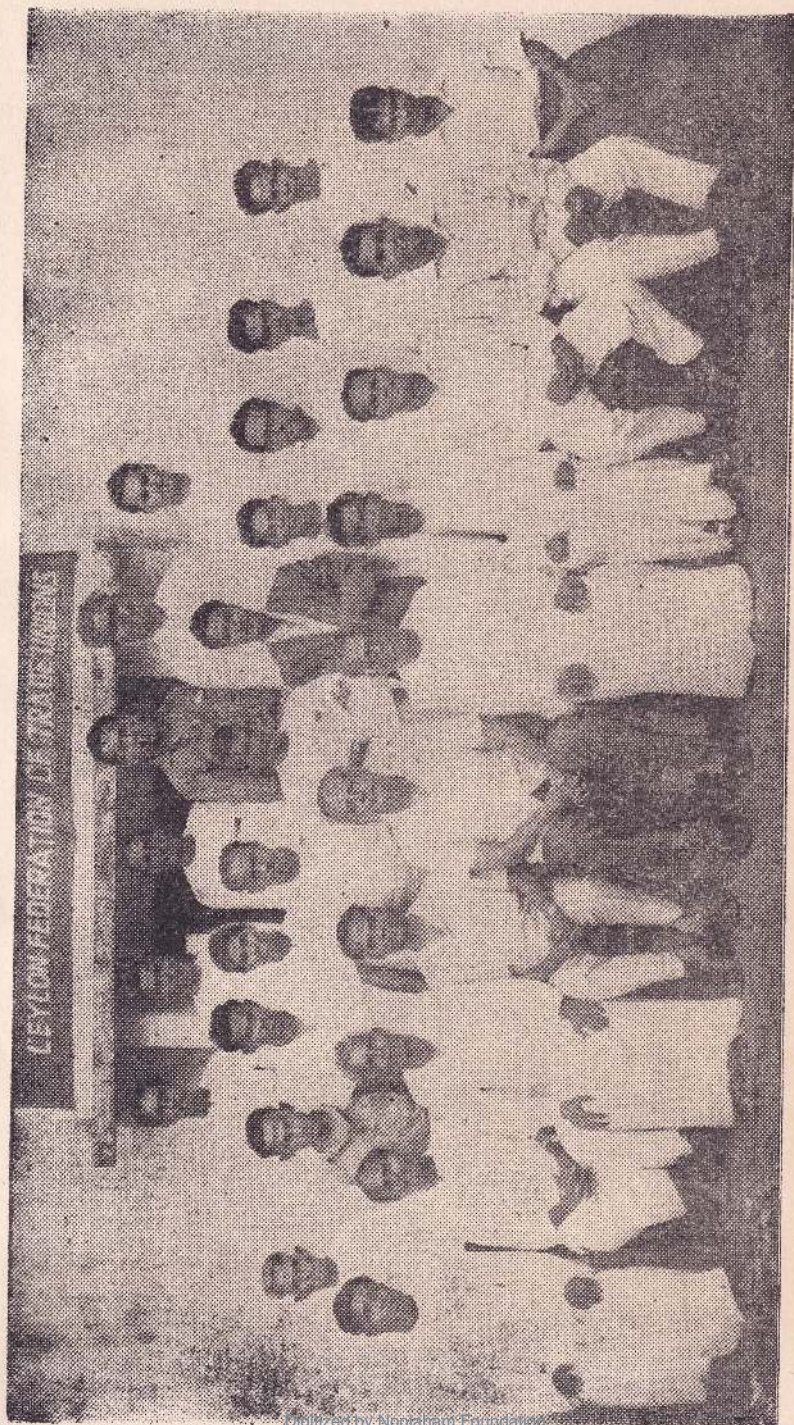
Sanmugathasan and his henchmen also took measures to prevent representatives known to be opposed to his views from attending the sessions. In some cases, delegates were not elected by the workers but handpicked by Sanmugathasan's supporters.

In his Presidential address to the so-called Sixteenth Sessions of the CTUF, M. G. Mendis exposed all these irregularities and the tragic situation that has arisen in the Federation. And when 236 delegates and observers at that sessions joined him in walking out of the conference hall, they were attacked with swords and iron rods.

These comrades, who walked out in protest against Sanmugathasan's undemocratic tactics, brazen conference-rigging and disruptive policies, met later and resolved to convene a real workers' conference which would ensure that the workers who had hitherto been organised in the CTUF would continue to fight their cause in close co-operation with the Communist Party and the Left and other progressive forces.

New Name

Accordingly a conference was held on the 25th January 1964. This conference, at which representatives of the overwhelming mass of workers organised by the CTUF were present, repudiated



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the splitting activities of the Sanmugathasan clique and decided to continue the militant policy of the CTUF and its fight for anti-imperialist and working class unity. In view of the legal position, the workers decided to organise themselves under the new name of the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, free from the baneful influence of Sanmugathasan and his henchmen.

By the time a Special Sessions of the CFTU was held in March, two month later, the overwhelming majority of the trade unions formerly affiliated to the CTUF had disaffiliated themselves and joined the CFTU. The overwhelming majority of workers formerly organised in the former CTUF thereby became members of our Federation.

Thus, it will be seen that our Federation is a new trade union centre only in a formal sense. Its members, affiliated unions, the factories, plantations, bus depots and other work-places organised by us as well as our leading personnel are all those formerly connected with the CTUF. Although the name is different, the substance is the same. It is our Federation that continues the traditions and policies of the CTUF which have been discarded by the Sanmugathasan clique.

This position has, in effect, been accepted by the World Federation of Trade Unions. A delegate from the WFTU came to Ceylon to attend the so-called 16th Sessions of the CTUF in December 1963. But he did not participate in it when he found out for himself the circumstances under which it was held. The same delegate later came for the Special Sessions of our Federation in March 1964 bringing us greetings and good wishes from the World Federation.

Similarly, M. G. Mendis who was the Ceylon delegate on the highest bodies of the WFTU has continued to hold them in spite of indefatigable efforts by Sanmugathasan and his foreign patrons to unseat him with the legalistic quibble that he is no longer associated with the CTUF. And at all meetings of the General Council and the Executive Committee of the WFTU, even after 1963, it is only Comrade Mendis who has had full rights to speak and vote on every question that came up at those meetings.

Like the workers of Ceylon, the workers of the world too organised in the World Federation of Trade Unions have accepted the fact that it is the members of the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions who have written the glorious pages related in this brief history, that it is in fact our Federation that is heir to all the revolutionary proletarian traditions of the past twenty five years.

We have been affiliated to the WFTU ever since our then President, Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe, attended its inaugural conference in Paris in 1945. Even before the foundation of the WFTU we associated ourselves with the preparatory work and M. G. Mendis sent warm greetings to the World Trade Union Conference held in London in early 1945, indicating support for the formation of a single world trade union organisation, which should be one of the main levers in building up a durable peace and a world family of democratic nations.

As a founder member of the WFTU our Federation played an effective and progressive role, especially during the early post war years. Under the Marshall Plan, Anglo-American imperialism not only suppressed militant trade unions but encouraged reactionary Government sponsored trade union organisations to break up the WFTU. In this situation we were able to join with the progressive trade union forces led by the powerful General Confederation of Trade Unions of France, General Confederation of Italian Trade Unions and of trade union organisations of Socialist countries to safeguard and maintain the leadership of the progressive world working class movement and its traditions.

The Special Sessions

The Special Sessions of the CFTU, as mentioned earlier, was held in March 1964 to uphold and continue the traditions, policies and principles of the trade unions affiliated to the CTUF since 1940. It demonstrated that its members were determined to uphold the unity of the working class on both national and international levels and to oppose all splitters of working class unity in Ceylon and on a world scale.

The Sessions was attended by Elis Moyo of Cuba as the official delegate of the World Federation of Trade Unions. It was also attended by fraternal delegates from a large number of national trade union centres from the USSR, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria and India.

Leading representatives of the national trade union centres in Ceylon too attended the Special Sessions and conveyed their greetings and expressions of solidarity with the CFTU. Such widespread expressions of solidarity have been rarely seen at any trade union conference in Ceylon before. They paid tribute to the work that our Federation was doing to promote the unity and vital interests of the working class of Ceylon.

Among the fraternal trade union organisations which sent representatives to these sessions were the Ceylon Federation of Labour, All-Ceylon Central Council of Trade Unions, Public Service Workers' Trade Union Federation, Ceylon Workers' Congress, Democratic Workers' Congress, Petroleum Corporation Workers' Union and the Sri Lanka Jatika Guru Sangamaya. The sessions concluded with a mammoth rally and demonstration.

The Twenty One Demands

The Special Sessions took place at a time when a degree of trade union unity was achieved which was never before seen in Ceylon. Fourteen of the most important trade union organisations in Ceylon had come together and formed the Joint Committee of Trade Unions. They could mobilise over one million workers, that is practically the entire organised workers in the country. They approved a list of 21 demands for the whole trade union movement.

The 21 demands included (a) pay increase of Re. 1/- per day or Rs. 30/- per month for all employees; (b) a maximum 45 hour working week for all employees; (c) 7 days casual leave and 30 days medical leave for all workers in the private sector and local bodies; (d) maternity leave for six weeks before and six weeks after confinement; (e) work for unemployed or relief under a scheme of unemployment insurance; (f) gratuity in one months' gross pay for each year of service prior to the inauguration of the Employee's Provident Fund; (g) full trade union, political and civic rights to public servants and full access to all estates for trade union officials; (h) equal pay for equal work without discrimination on the basis of sex or of language as in the case of teachers.

The CFTU took a prominent and important part in bringing about this measure of unity, in setting up of the Joint Committee of Trade Unions and in getting the list of 21 demands approved by the whole trade union movement. This brought about a great change in the political climate of the country and the then government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike appealed for support from and alliance with the working class to fight reaction.

Informal discussions were started towards setting up a Government which would include representatives from the Left and the working class movement. But the reactionary forces and vested interests were frightened and set about to sabotage the formation of such a Government. They utilised the reactionary and wavering elements inside the then Government and also the Right opportunist

and Left sectarian elements in the working class movement itself and were thus able to limit the coalition government that was formed to include only one of the Left parties, namely the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. This coalition was inadequate to mobilise the working class as a whole and, to a certain extent, disrupted the unity of the Left and trade union movement.

However, it was an improvement on the earlier relation of forces within the Government and the reactionary and vested interests set about mobilising and uniting their forces and carried on a formidable and unscrupulous campaign to overthrow the Government. The ultra-revolutionary splitters in the trade union movement such as N. Sanmugathasan and Bala Tampoe, in effect assisted the reactionaries and vested interests by seeking to make use of the fight for the 21 demands to help this offensive of reaction to bring down the Government.

The Public Service Workers' Trade Union Federation and the Sri Lanka Jathika Guru Sangamaya proposed that the letter submitting the 21 demands to the Coalition Government should contain a paragraph condemning the campaign that the vested interests had launched against the Government and stating that the workers' fight for 21 demands had nothing to do with this campaign.

This paragraph stated that "as there have been attempts in certain sections of the press and elsewhere to misrepresent matters in connection with these 21 demands we wish to state categorically that, in presenting these demands, the undersigned trade union organisations seek to ensure a satisfactory settlement of the urgent problems of the working class. We condemn and oppose the present campaign that the vested interests have launched against the Government and wish to emphasise that, while seeking a satisfactory settlement between the Government and the working class in the matter of the 21 demands, the signatories will continue to fight against the campaign of these vested interests. It is our belief that the Government too can best ensure the co-operation of the working class in the fight against the reactionary forces by discussing the outstanding problems of the working class with the representatives of the trade unions in order to reach a satisfactory settlement."

N. Sanmugathasan (CTUF), Bala Tampoe (CMU), S. Thondaman (CWC) and Tilak Kulasekara (CCTU) insisted on the omission of this paragraph and no settlement could be reached. Eventually, on 24th November 1964, the 21 demands were presented to the Government and the private employees by only the CFTU, PSW-TUF and the SLJGS.

Defeat of the Coalition Govt.

The following month, that is on the 3rd December 1964, a united front of the reactionary forces consisting of the United National Party, the Federal Party and the British vested interests represented by Singleton Salmon, in league with certain pro-imperialist right-wing elements in the Government Party itself, who dealt the "stab in the back" to that Party, succeeded in defeating the Government in Parliament by one vote. This defeat would not have taken place if two members of Parliament, Edmund Samarakkody and Merill Fernando belonging to Tampoe's political party, had not joined hands with the reactionaries and with those who dealt the "stab in the back".

Eight major trade union centres in the public and private sectors, among whom were the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, the Sri Lanka Independent Trade Union Federation and the Ceylon Federation of Labour, called for a half-day general strike in Colombo and for a demonstration and Galle Face rally for the 9th December 1964 to protest against the "stab in the back" and to condemn and oppose the reactionary conspiracy. The call evoked tremendous response from the Colombo workers and 80,000 workers marched fifteen abreast, from Campbell Park to Galle Face Green and more than two lakhs of people filled Galle Face Green for the rally. Despite the efforts of Sanmugathasan and Tampoe, many workers belonging to their unions too joined with the rest in that massive protest against reaction.

U.N.P. - F.P. Led Government

The March 1965 Parliamentary election was an indecisive one with no political party getting a clear majority to form the Government. There was a short period of political uncertainty. After much secret bargaining a make-shift rightist Government of seven political parties was formed under the leadership of the United National Party and the Federal Party, also called the Tamil Arasu Kadchi (The Tamil Kingdom Party). These seven parties of varying sizes and political influence in the country contested the elections on manifestos with different and sometimes diametrically opposed election pledges. They, however, have now come together on the one thing that unites them, their opposition to the Coalition and to the Left parties.

The UNP and the FP entered into a secret pact on the basis of which they formed a Government. They wrongly and deceptively called it a "National" government though the party with the second largest number of members in the Parliament, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, and the Left parties are not in this so-called "National" government but in the opposition.

The formation of the UNP-FP led government is a great setback to the entire trade union and progressive movement in Ceylon. One of the first acts of this Government, after it assumed power, was to start a large scale war of victimisation against the CTB workers and other employees as the first step in its plan to smash the entire progressive trade union movement.

The first mass demonstration and protest against the repressive acts of the UNP-FP led government, was made soon after its formation, that is on May Day 1965. Our Federation joined with all the other leading trade union centres and progressive political parties and organised what was undoubtedly the biggest May Day rally ever seen in Ceylon.

Then on 19th June 1965 the Ceylon Federation of trade Unions, the Sri Lanka Independent Trade Union Federation, the Sri Lanka Jathika Guru Sangamaya and other trade unions organised a mass demonstration and rally under the slogans "Hands Off Teachers! Stop Acts of Political Revenge". About 12,000 people including more than 5,000 teachers took part in this demonstration from Campbell Park to Hyde Park and many more thousands attended the rally at Hyde Park. In his presidential speech that day, M. G. Mendis said "the huge crowd present, perhaps the biggest ever seen in Hyde Park, was a sign of the tremendous popular support that the teachers enjoyed and a resounding rebuff to the Government."

January 8th Strike

On January 8, 1966 the UNP-FP led Government took its first step to implement the secret agreement of the UNP and the FP by including in Parliament certain regulations under the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act. The working class and, in particular, the members of the CFTU have at all times fought for the legitimate rights of all people including the minorities. If the regulations were only intended to grant the legitimate rights of the Tamil speaking people respecting the use of their language the CFTU would have whole heartedly supported them.

But the working class and the mass of the people were not fooled by the Government's claim that it was only implementing the late Bandaranaike's policy of granting the legitimate rights of the minorities. This was also an attempt to prevent Sinhalese replacing English as the official language and the first step to implement the provisions of the secret pact entered into by the United National Party and the Federal Party. If the provisions of this pact are implemented the country will be divided into two.

The UNP and Dudley Senanayake have all along been opposed to the provisions which are now found in the secret pact. But they were forced to enter into this pact so that they might get the support of the Federal Party to enable them, some how or other, to form a Government.

This is what Dudley Senanayake, as leader of the opposition, stated in the last Parliament in 1961 in his speech on the Emergency declared by the Sirimavo Bandaranaike Government.

"The Federal Party is using any discontent that is caused among the Tamil people over the language issue, for an entirely different purpose. The Federal Party was started, long before language became an issue, for the purpose of achieving a number of avowed objects.....This language question, they have always stated, is a step towards the achievement of their objectives. Two or three years before the satyagraha movement they stated their objectives in specific, explicit terms: firstly, a federal constitution; secondly, the language question - parity of status throughout the country for the two languages; thirdly, citizenship rights for all of Indian origin in Ceylon, fourthly, the stoppage of future colonization of the Northern and Eastern Provinces by Sinhalese. These are the demands for which the Federal Party stands.

"I do not think any political Party, not thinking along communal lines but thinking along national lines, thinking of ultimate national unity itself, could agree to the demands of the Federal Party....Over and over again we have given ample reasons why it is impossible to agree to the four demands of the Federal Party".

What was the impossible to agree to then is becoming possible to agree to now because of political expediency.

It is widely publicised that the language question has now been solved by the UNP-FP led Government. However, the Federal Party leader S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, seems to think otherwise. In his statement to the "Suthanthiran" he had stated that "according to the law recently passed the (the Tamils) can correspond with the

Government in Tamil.. This is not adequate for us. Only if Tamil gets parity of status in the other seven provinces it would mean that they would have got their full rights....Our aim is some how or other to achieve parity of status for Tamil."

G. G. Ponnambalam, the leader of the Tamil Congress too is opposed to the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act. The Tamil Congress is one of the political parties which is a staunch supporter of the present government. But Ponnambalam is of the opinion that the Tamil Language Act will not do any good to the Tamils as it can be quashed by another government. He opines that the only solution to the language problem lies in a round table conference of all parties (Sun, June 30, 1966).

In their election campaign a number of political parties, including the United National Party, advocated a round table conference of all parties to solve the language problem. After the UNP-FP secret pact the UNP have given up the idea of having a round table conference.

In its issue of 28th November 1965 **Jana Sathiya** published particulars of what it described as "the secret documents relating to the Dudley-Chelvanayakam Pact". The final clause as given therein must be noted carefully. It states:

"4. The land Development Ordinance will be amended to provide that citizens of Ceylon be entitled to the allotment of land under Ordinance. Senanayake further agreed that in the granting of land under colonisation schemes the following priorities be observed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces:

- (a) Land in the Northern and Eastern Provinces should in the first instance be granted to landless persons in the District.
- (b) Secondly to Tamil-Speaking persons resident in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and
- (c) Thirdly, to other citizens in Ceylon, preference being given to Tamil citizens in the rest of the land."

Thus, according to this reported pact, in the allocation of land in the Northern and Eastern provinces Tamil citizens, even those resident outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces, even if they own land, are given preference over the landless citizens of other communities. In conditions of a steadily increasing land hunger in the country this will be a continuing source of friction and of conflict between the communities.

Hence the Coalition parties and the leading trade unions, including the CFTU, called a general strike for the 8th of January

1966 and tens of thousands of workers answered the call. A peaceful procession of Buddhist priests, workers and people taking a mammoth petition signed by more than a lakh of people protesting against the regulations to the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, went along Galle Road towards Galle Face to hand over the petition to the Prime Minister in Parliament. They were dispersed by the combined action of the police, military and navy resulting in the death of a Buddhist priest and injuries to hundreds of others.

A State of Emergency was declared on that day and regulations introduced whereby the democratic rights of the people were restricted and censorship of the press introduced. The printing presses where the opposition papers "Aththa" and "Janadina" were printed were sealed and they were prevented from printing these papers for several months. The trade unions in the public sector were penalised. Pieter Keuneman, in this speech in Parliament on 11th March 1966, described the situation as follows:

"It is quite clear that it is the Government's policy to try to behead and paralyse the public sector trade unions by summarily interdicting the leaders at various levels and keeping them for an indefinite time, for months on end, without even giving them the opportunity to defend themselves before a duly constituted tribunal against any charges that may be framed against them.

"They began this policy with the teachers. About 10 months ago they interdicted nearly 300 leading officials of the Sri Lanka Guru Sangamaya. In the past 10 months they have held inquiries into the cases of only a handful, less than 10, of such interdicted persons. It took them 10 months to hold inquiries into 7 out of the 300 cases of interdicted teachers. Even in the majority of cases where inquiries have been held, verdicts have still not been given. Matters have still not been finalized. The same policy is now being extended to the public sector and the Public Service. ...

"In addition, over 6,000 workers have had their work stopped. Nearly 40,000 employees in Government Departments and elsewhere in the public sector have been fined. They have had 8 days of their pay cut for being away from work on the 8th of January, 1966. This is what has been going on in the name of a State of Emergency. This is one of the main purposes for the State of Emergency."

In the history of the trade union movement this is the biggest repression carried out by any government. The Ceylon Transport Board alone dismissed more than 3,000 workers.

Fifteen Demands

The 15 demands representing the immediate needs of the working class and the trade unions in both the public and private sectors were adopted on the 30th April 1966 by the 11 trade union centres, namely, the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, Ceylon Federation of Labour, Sri Lanka Independent Trade Union Federation, Government Workers' Trade Union Federation, Public Service Workers' Trade Union Federation, Government Clerical Service Union, Sri Lanka Jathika Guru Sangamaya, Sri Lanka Independent Government Workers' Trade Union Federation, Samastha Lanka Rajaye Lipikaru Sangamaya, Ceylon Petroleum Employees' Unions and the Public Service League, who are organised in the Joint Committee of Trade Unions. The 15 demands included (a) the cancellation of the vindictive punishments and punitive transfers of Government Servants and employees of state corporations; (b) bringing down the cost of essential goods; (c) special living allowance of Rs. 17/50 to all employees who still do not receive it; (d) pay increase of Re. 1/- per day or Rs. 30/- per month for all employees; (e) treble the amount of compensation payable under the workmen's compensation Act; (f) work or unemployment allowance for the unemployed; (g) seven days casual leave and 30 days medical leave annually, an eight-hour day and forty-hour week for all employees; and (h) equal pay for equal work irrespective of sex or language differences. The 1966 SLFP-LSSP-CP May Day rally, held at Independence Square, endorsed the 15 demands.

Committee of Inquiry

A Committee of Inquiry was set up in December 1965 by the Minister for Labour, Employment and Housing to inquire into the law and practice of the Trade Unions Ordinance. This is only a departmental committee set up by the Ministry to advise it and is not a Commission appointed by the Governor-General. From the public pronouncements that were made by the Minister of Labour and by other members of the Government, the leading trade union centres considered the appointment of the Committee of Inquiry as a blind to cover the proposed legislation to cripple the progressive trade union movement. One of the main purposes seems to be to incorporate a clause in the Trade Union Ordinance which, in effect, would ban left politicians from having any connections with the trade unions. Practically all the leading trade union centres, including the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, have boycotted this Committee of Inquiry.

Politics and Trade Unions

The action of the trade unions protesting against the implementation of the secret pact between the UNP and the FP, which would lead to the division of the country, has been criticised by members of the Government and by the capitalist press. The hard-won right of the working class to take political action, in matters which concern it and also in matters concerning the country and people in general, is being disputed by them. They are trying to confuse the public by saying that trade unions should restrict their activities to matters concerning their wages and conditions of work only. Dudley Senanayake, the Prime Minister, while speaking in Parliament on 26th January 1966 about the strike protesting against the regulations to the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, stated that "this is a decision of the Government and it has nothing to do with trade union activities. This is the Government's language policy. What has that got to do with trade union rights?"

All over the world trade unions go into politics. They do so because they find that some of their objects can be won only by political action and that other objects can be won faster by such action. The trade unions cannot get good schools for all children and decent housing and health services for all by collective bargaining with the employers. Minimum wages, standard hours of work, holidays with pay, employees, provident fund, old age pensions, protection of young workers and women workers, workmen's compensation - these objects can be won more effectively through political action than through bargaining with the employers. Where laws exist or are enacted which interfere with the proper functioning of trade unions then the trade unions have to go in for political action to change these laws.

This question of whether trade unions could go into politics came up in England in the early part of this century and was answered quite clearly in the affirmative. This position is accepted and trade unions in every part of the world take part in politics. But there are still some people and sections of the press in our country who continue to argue against it.

When the Bill introducing the Trade Unions Ordinance No. 14 of 1935 was debated in the State Council, Dr. S. A. Wickremasinghe, while opposing the provisions in this Bill prohibiting trade unions from spending monies for the promotion of the civic and political interests of their members, except from contributions separately levied for this purpose, said that "in England, after the Combination Laws were repealed, trade unions were entirely free to spend money for political purposes. In the Osborne Judgment

the judge held that it was **ultra-vires** on the part of trade unions to spend money for political purposes. Until that time trade unions had entire freedom to spend money as they liked for purposes of the trade unions.

Then, there was agitation in England that the disabilities resulting from that judgment should be removed. As a result of that agitation a Trade Unions Amendment Act was passed. If any worker wanted to abstain from contributing to a political fund, he had definitely to say so."

W. V. Osborne, a member of the union called the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, brought an action in 1908 against the union, to restrain it from spending any of its funds on political objects, contending that this was beyond the powers of a trade union. Osborne, who was liberally financed from capitalist sources, took his case up to the highest tribunal, the House of Lords. It gave judgment in his favour on the ground that trade unions were corporate bodies formed under statute and were not entitled to carry out any activities not specifically provided for in the trade union Act of 1876. By this judgment the trade unions were not only prohibited from political activities but were also prohibited from carrying on activities of a social nature such as education, even if all the members of the union desired them. The result of this judgment is described by Sydney and Beatrice Webb in their monumental work: "The History of Trade Unionism".

"The result was that all Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, and indeed, all informal groups of workmen or employers falling within this definition, suddenly found themselves (to the complete amazement of every one concerned, including the lawyers) rigidly confined in their action, even if all their members otherwise wished and agreed, to matters which were specified in an enumerating clause of an Act of Parliament of a generation before which had never before been supposed to have that meaning or to have any restrictive effect at all. We ought to speak with proper respect of the judges, though sometimes, by their curious ignorance of life outside the Law Courts, and especially of "what everybody knows", they try us hard. But it is necessary to state plainly, with regard to this part of the Osborne Judgment, that to the present writers, as to the whole British working class and many other people, including lawyers, it seemed an astounding aberration, amounting to a grave miscarriage of justice." (Ibid p. 616).

"The Osborne Judgment received the support, not only of the great mass of property owners and professional men, but also,

though tacitly, of the Liberal and Conservative Parties. A distinct challenge was thereby thrown down to the Trade Union world. Not only were the activities of their unions to be crippled, not only was their freedom to combine for whatever purposes they chose to be abrogated, they were to be expressly forbidden to aspire to protect their interests or promote their objectives by Parliamentary representation, or in any way to engage in politics. It was this challenge to Organised Labour that absorbed the whole interest of the Trade Union world for the next three or four years". (Ibid p. 627).

There was intense agitation and industrial strife in England following the Osborne Judgment and which led to the passing of the Trade Union Act of 1913. It was only after this Act that the position of the trade unions was restored.

"The final result of the successive attempts between 1901 and 1913 to cripple Trade Unionism by legal proceedings was to give it the firmest possible basis in statute Law. The fight of workmen to combine for any purpose not in itself unlawful was definitely established. The strike, with its "restraint of trade" and its interference with profits and business; peaceful picketing even on an extensive scale; the persuasion of workmen to withdraw from employment even in breach of contract, and the other frequent incidents of an industrial dispute were specifically declared to be, not only not criminal, but actually lawful. The right of Trade Unions to undertake whatever political and other activities their members might desire was expressly conceded. Finally, a complete immunity of Trade Unions in their corporate capacity from being sued or made answerable in damages, for any act whatsoever, however great might be the damage thereby caused to other parties, was established by statute in the most absolute form." (Ibid p. 633)

This was the position of the trade unions in England upto 1927. But in that year this position was modified as an aftermath of the failure of the General Strike of 1926.

In 1925 there was a slump and the miners were faced with new wage reductions and longer hours of work. They appealed for support to the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. After prolonged negotiations a general strike was called for 3rd May 1926, and it lasted for nine days. Although before this time general strikes had been called in other countries like France and Sweden, this was the first general strike called out in England.

The Conservative Government and the capitalist class came down on the workers with their full force, and the strike was defeated. "The employers were severe in their treatment of the defeated miners and other workers. The Government passed in 1927 a new Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act which the unions regarded as vindictive. It not only forbade general strikes and most sympathetic strikes, imposed fresh restrictions of picketing, and forced Civil Service unions to leave the T.U.C. and the Labour Party, but also weakened the Labour Party financially by ruling that trade unionists must 'contract in' to pay the political levy instead of 'contracting out' if they did not want to pay it." (**Trade Unions**) by Eric L. Wigham p. 38).

The workers and their trade unions continuously agitated for the repeal of this repressive Act but were not successful until the Labour Party won the General Elections in 1945. The Trade Union Act of 1946, consisting of one clause, repealed the 1927 Act by providing that "Every enactment and rule of law amended or otherwise effected by that Act shall, as from the commencement of this Act, have effect as if the Act of 1927 had not been passed." The original position of the trade unions was thus restored.

The Trade Unions Ordinance, No. 14 of 1935 was adopted from the English Acts on trade unions including the Act of 1927, which was valid at that time. It was introduced by the Imperialist Government and was passed in the State Council with the assistance of their friends, like D. S. Senanayake and others, in the teeth of opposition by all those who were for a fair deal for the workers.

Proletarian Internationalism

The Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions has played an active and important part not only in the national struggles but it has also contributed its share for the general well-being of the workers and peoples of the world. CFTU delegates have attended and participated in national trade union congresses held in different countries, including those held in the socialist countries. CFTU delegates have attended the 6th World Trade Union Congress held in Warsaw in October 1965 to mark the twentieth anniversary of the World Federation of Trade Unions. CFTU delegates have also attended the Vietnam Solidarity Conference in Hanoi, the Fourth International Conference of Trade Unions of Food, Tobacco, Beverages, Hotel and Restaurant Workers in Prague and the Fourth International Conference of Port Transport and Fisheries Workers in Sofia.

The CFTU has always supported and expressed its solidarity with all peoples fighting for their liberation and against imperialist aggressions and for world peace. The CFTU, together with other leading trade union centres in Ceylon, issued a joint statement condemning American aggression against Vietnam, expressing solidarity with her people fighting against foreign aggressions and demanding the implementation of the 1954 Geneva Agreements as the way to bring peace to that unfortunate country. Public meetings were organised to explain to the people the truth of what is happening in Vietnam and to mobilise public support on behalf of the Vietnamese people and against the US aggressors.

Spearhead of the Movement

The Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions has emerged as the spearhead of the whole trade union movement in Ceylon. It has acted together with other trade union centres to wage common struggles and win common demands and has contributed substantially to steadily rebuild the trade union unity which was split asunder by the adventurists, splitters and disruptors and to bring nearer the day when the working class will emerge as the decisive force in our society destined to play the role which it has been entrusted by history.

THE END

