

CATASTROPHE

JULY '83

can sri lanka survive?

TISSA BALASURIYA o. m. i.

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**REMITTANCES IN FAVOUR OF
'CENTRE FOR SOCIETY AND RELIGION'**

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PART I

ETHNIC RELATIONS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

A. RACE, CLASS AND POWER

Inter-racial communal relations have been a cause of much disharmony, tension and even conflict in Sri Lankan history during the past half century. We are now in a period of heightened tensions. Passions tend to be aroused, and calm **rational** judgement may take second place in people's decision making. It is however in such situations that we must try to take as objective a look at the reality as we can. When there are tensions and conflicts over a long period of time, it is an indication that some deep-seated objective problems exist which need to be understood for a satisfactory solution to be evolved for them.

Race, religion, language and culture are important factors that unite people and separate them from others. Class is also another important line of division. In Sri Lankan politics these lines of unity and division interact as in most Asian countries. To try to understand Sri Lankan society during the past 50-60 years we have to recognize the fears and grievances of these different groups, specially of the ethnic groups. We have also to realize that in the inter-relation of different groups, the stronger tend to dominate the weaker. The richer class, the stronger sex, the dominant race tends to use economic, political, cultural and religious power to their advantage as against the poorer classes, the weaker sex and **races**. This can be seen in almost any society in the world. Sri Lanka has not been an exception in this.

The dominant group tends to shape the political constitution, the legal system, the educational system, the plans for economic development, the cultural values

and even religious and moral principles to suit its purposes and advancement. The dominant also appropriate to themselves the monopoly of the legal use of force in order to maintain the overall social, political and economic system that it fashions. The forces of law and order are used for this. The courts have to enforce the law of the powerful law makers. Even peoples mentalities are formed to accept the policies and priorities of the powerful. The mass media are used extensively for this purpose. Thus the British used all these means when they ruled Sri Lanka. Often times the dominant group internalizes its own myths so deeply that it is insensitive to the suffering of the victims of its oppression. Thus West Pakistan was not aware in 1970 as to how much East Pakistan or the Bengalis resented their policies of domination.

While understanding the factors of race we have to recognize that racial prejudice can be a cause of much harm to all the people of a country. We need to overcome the limitations and evils of race. We have to guard ourselves against the tendency to regard one's race as superior to others or having a right to dominate others. This is racism. Racism tends to look down on persons of other races. Racism, that is prejudiced against others, is an enemy of one's own genuine goodness and humanity. It blinds a people to the good in others; and breeds hatred in the minds and hearts of people. Much of the racial troubles among peoples is due to such racist feelings.

Sometimes the factors of race are used by political leaders to rouse the masses for their political advantage. Political parties and leaders can, in their seeking for power, be the enemies of the common good of all when they appeal to the peoples dormant racist prejudices.

While appreciating the significance of race in a historical perspective and as a current psychological factor, we have to overcome it by transcending the narrowness

of racism. A wider loyalty to the common human good beyond narrow considerations of race is required for building the unity of multi-racial countries based on justice and fairplay for all. This is in fact, the best inspiration in the culture and religions of the different races of our country. In Sri Lanka it would be more correct to use the term "ethnic" instead of "racial" in reference to the Sinhala, Tamil, Moor and Malay people. However the 'phenomena of our inter relations have characteristics similar to those among different races. The terms "race" and "racism" express better some of these characteristics than the words "ethnicity" and "ethnicism".

B. HISTORICALLY A MULTI-ETHNIC ISLAND

Sri Lanka has been over the centuries a multi-racial island. It may be debated as to whether the Sinhala or the Tamil people came here first - both of course, are of Indian descent. There is however no doubt that for over two-thousand years the two peoples have inhabited this island. They have preserved and developed their languages, religions and culture. They have generally lived in peaceful communion with concentrations of the Sinhalese in the South and of Tamils in the North.

It is also a historical fact that the Sinhala and Tamil people have ruled themselves independently during various periods of this long millennial history. Sometimes there have been conflicts between them, and at other times even alliances against foreign invaders. Dutugemunu is said to have defeated Elara the Tamil King who ruled most or all of the country for forty years. It is in more recent centuries that Moors and Malays, European settlers and plantation workers of Indian origin came to this country. We have to be careful against the tendency to think of Sri Lanka as exclusively Sinhala land then or today.

Today all these peoples have, as citizens of this country, a right to live as equals within a single Sri Lanka. In this book we are, however, dealing mainly with the relationship between the Sinhala and Sri Lankan Tamils of very long-term residence in this country.

C. SINHALA NATIONALISM AND GRIEVANCES

Sinhala nationalism feels strongly that Sri Lanka is the country of the Sinhala people, where they have lived for over 2,500 years. The basic historical grievance of the Sinhala people is that lands they consider theirs have been invaded by successive groups of people of other races. The Sinhala claim is also one intimately based on conquest and or settlement during thousands of years. Tamils from South India, Moors, Malays, Europeans and again South Indian Tamils have settled in this country which the Sinhalese consider is the only place on earth that can be theirs. They have nowhere else where they can belong as original citizens. This is a very deep and strong sentiment among the Sinhala people. Sinhala Buddhists feel this all the more. They tend to identify the future of Theravada Buddhism with the destiny of the Sinhala people.

The settling of a million people of South India in the hill-country during the British period is particularly resented by Sinhala nationalism. In this way the ethnic composition of the population was so changed that Tamils from being a 10% became about 20% of the population. It would seem that prior to the arrival of Moors and Malays the Sinhala population was about 90% of the country's population. The Sinhala people have this historical memory.

Given the presence of over 50 million people of the Tamil race in South India, the Sinhala people have a feeling of being a minority in the wider geographical context of India and Sri Lanka. It is in this situation that the Sinhala people almost as a whole are not prepared to coun-

tenance the division of the country into two separate sovereign states. This they feel will easily lead to a complete change in the ethnic composition of the island's population with a possible influx of South Indian people to an independent Eelam, and from there to the rest of the Island. The opposition to federalism and even district councils is partly due to a fear of openness to such an alien influence and influx.

In order to appreciate the sensitivities of the Sinhala people we have to understand their consciousness of being a minority in the Indian Ocean region. They are a majority in the country with a minority consciousness in a more global perspective. The closeness of India and the interest of Tamil Nadu people in Sri Lanka ethnic relations intensifies Sinhala consciousness of being a regional minority that has to defend its identity and independence.

The recent internationalization of the Sri Lankan "national question" specially after July 1983 has made the Sinhala people even more conscious of their being a small group of 11 million in a vast world in which their point of view is under represented or inadequately appreciated.

Another grievance of the Sinhala people is that, while the Tamil people resent State colonization in the Dry Zone including sections of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, a considerable percentage of the Tamil people have settled down in the Sinhala areas specially in the towns. There are several sectors of Colombo which have a large Tamil population as in Wellawatte and Kotahena. The Tamils had an advantage during British times thanks to their lead in education due to missionary schools and perhaps the sympathy of the British government. The Sinhala elite thought this to be part of a policy of "divide and rule". At the end of British rule the Tamils had a

distinct advantage in higher education and consequently in employment in the professions and public services. The Sinhala Buddhists were quite disadvantaged when compared to Christians and Hindus of the North and East. This position continued till rather recent times. Some of the post-independence policies of pro-Sinhala governments was to redress this imbalance.

The advantage in trade that other ethnic groups had and have is also a Sinhala grievance. Moors, Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and Europeans controlled much of the trade in the big cities and towns. During times of economic difficulties, the hostility of the majority tends to be directed towards traders of minority ethnic groups. This can be seen in each of the communal disturbances 1958, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1983. The looting of shops is related to the common interests of an urban underworld and traders of the ethnic majority in a given place. These are some of the Sinhala grievances in relation to land and population, employment and education.

During the past decade the Sinhala people have been estranged not only by the demand for a Sovereign state of Eelam but more so by the increasing use of sporadic violence by the Tamil youth against those they consider obstacles to their goal of Tamil Eelam. Such violence tends to provoke indiscriminate retaliation by the armed forces and the police, and sometimes by the Sinhala people in the South. Seldom do they reflect on the longer term causes of this recourse to violence by the Tamil youth militants.

While Sinhala people have such legitimate grievances, we have to keep in mind that during the last 53 years they have had the dominant power in the government of the country concerning internal affairs since 1931, and from 1948 in all matters. This is a reality. The Government of Sri Lanka during the past four to five decades has been

very largely a Sinhala Government. Hence the constitutions, laws, economic and cultural policies and even the defence forces have been shaped to suit the aspirations of the Sinhala majority, that has been politically dominant. The mass media are so conditioned that the Sinhala people are often not consciously aware of their dominant position. Or rather they take it for granted and are not as sensitive to what the people of other races consider are their rights.

D. TAMIL NATIONALISM AND GRIEVANCES

The achievement of Independence in 1948 was substantially a transfer of political power to the Sinhala leadership. It did not satisfy the aspirations of the Tamil people. We have to understand this in the context of Tamil nationalism seen in a long term historical perspective.

The Tamil people are not only ancient inhabitants of this country, they have a distinctive and much respected culture, language and religion, different from those of the Sinhala people. They have been a self-governing sovereign people during different periods of their long history. Tamil Kings have sometimes ruled the Sinhala people. In times past there have been Tamil dynasties exercising power and influence in the South of Lanka also. The Tamil people have a historical memory of their former independent dominion over their affairs, even though it be under unjust regimes in terms of caste and class - a common feature in the rest of Lanka also.

From the Tamil point of view both the Sinhala and the Tamil peoples lost their sovereignty due to foreign invasions since the 16th century. The Tamil areas were however administered separately till Ceylon was unified in 1833 to be governed as one country by the British. It is even contended that Tamil rulers in the North suffered

the loss of their power due to their efforts to help the Kandyan Kings against foreign rulers.

For an understanding of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka in the 20th century it is very important to constantly keep this perspective in mind. Even though the Tamils are now widely dispersed in the country, the main heartland of Tamil existence as a people is in the North, particularly the Peninsula. Thus, despite all alien rule, the Tamil way of life of the people has endured. The modern revival of Tamil has fed Tamil nationalism with a sense of historical past, present indignity and future destiny. The Tamils of Sri Lanka feel they can make a significant contribution to the Tamil people spread all over the world by retaining and developing their identity as a nation.

It is a noteworthy factor that while there are over 60 million Tamils living mainly in India, but also spread out in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Tamil people have no independent sovereign state of their own anywhere in the globe.

The history of the past three decades has heightened this sense of nationalism. "Sinhala Only" since 1956 meant also "Tamil Only" in the Tamil areas. English was downgraded and Sinhala was not accepted as the official language of the Tamil people. A people, proud of their cultural heritage, refused to be subordinated to the laws imposing a foreign language as their official language. During many decades the Sinhala people as a whole did not appreciate the unyielding tenacity of the Tamils to their language and language rights. It is only in recent years that some recognition has been given to Tamil as a "national language". It is not yet an "Official Language" of Sri Lanka.

The other races in Sri Lanka have also their identities, problems and grievances. The Moors, Malays and Por-

tuguese and Dutch Burghers have come in more recent centuries. They do not have a presence together in one territory for thousands of years. While appreciating the rights of all the peoples of Sri Lanka we have to recognize the millenial presence of the Tamil people in this country. This may help us understand their aspirations and struggles.

In the consideration of the Sinhala - Tamil relations and problem there is a tendency to overlook the very significant spread of the Moor and Malay peoples in the North, East, West and South of the country. The geographical distribution of the ethnic groups is an important factor in this inter relation.

The plantation workers of recent Indian origin do not have the same sense of nationalism as the Tamils who have been in Sri Lanka for centuries. As a people the plantation workers have been long used to being dominated by their caste, class and race over-lords. They were brought to Ceylon under conditions, of terrible exploitation and kept on estates in lines under semi-slave conditions. The local elites and the White plantation "Dorais" bossed over them during their whole lives.

They are unfortunate victims of the British colonial enterprise of the tea and rubber plantations. They have laboured hard and sacrificed their lives to build up and maintain the plantations which have benefited mainly the British companies. Presently these estates are a very important capital asset of the country that contributes to the national income substantially in terms of profits and foreign exchange.

However for the Sinhala people specially in the Central highlands the plantation workers have been cheap labour brought in by a foreign ruler who expropriated their lands. Hence the Sinhala people feel that some of their

most fertile lands have been populated by these migrants from India. It is for this reason that post independence governments have insisted on sending back some of them to India. Thus about 250,000 people have been "repatriated" under the agreements between Indian and Sri Lankan governments.

Today the plantation workers are becoming more and more entangled in the ethnic competition between the Sinhala and Sri Lankan Tamil peoples. They often suffer the worst in this sad state of affairs.

They have not yet emerged as a self-reliant, self-conscious people who will struggle vigorously for their basic human rights. They are far from a feeling of having a right to sovereignty. Their demands now are for citizenship and the opportunity to earn a decent living in this country. For many of them this is only their second native land, as they have not quite given up the links with India their great mother-land. This is the present position, though in the future there may be a greater linkage of the common interests of all Tamil people in this island, and a deeper consciousness among these people of their fundamental human rights which are still denied to them. They are among the most disadvantaged in the country. The realization of the human rights of these Tamils of recent Indian origin is a challenge to the humanity of all the citizens of this country.

In post-independent Sri Lanka the Burghers of Portuguese and Dutch origin and the descendents of the British felt that their children would be at a disadvantage mainly due to the change in the medium of instruction in the schools from English to Sinhala and Tamil. Vast numbers from among them migrated from Sri Lanka mainly to other British Commonwealth countries. Those who remained in Sri Lanka have generally opted to fit into the new ethos of Sri Lanka.

The changes in the composition of the population of Sri Lanka during the past 100 years reveals the impact of these different situations and policy orientations.

In the study of the population changes in Sri Lanka during the hundred years from 1881 to 1981 we see certain significant characteristics.

The first is the increase of population from 2.7 million in 1881 to nearly 15 million in 1981.

The main change in ethnic composition has been due to the influx and return of the Indian Tamils. They began to come in or be brought in the early decades of the last century. By 1911 they were 13% of the population and in 1931 they constituted 15.4%. There is a significant decline in their numbers and proportion to 12.0 in 1953; 10.6 in 1963; 9.25 in 1971 and 5.6 in 1981..

It is this decline that has raised the Sinhala percentage from 65.4% in 1931 to 74% in 1981. There have been similar increases in the Ceylon Tamil and Moor populations. The Europeans, Burghers and Eurasians declined from 0.8% in 1931 to 0.25 in 1981. The total population of Tamils both groups (Ceylon Tamils and Indian Tamils) has declined from 26.68% in 1906 to 18.15% in 1981.

In the discussion on land distribution and colonization it is good to keep these trends in mind and to note that during the past century it is mainly the areas where Sinhala people have been residing that have received persons of another ethnic group viz, the Indian Tamils. This was the way historical events have taken shape.

In viewing the future use of the land in relation to the ethnic composition of the population it is good to keep in mind that Digitized by Noolaham Foundation.
noolaham.org@gmail.com Colombo district has the highest

number of Sri Lankan Tamils after Jaffna and Batticaloa districts.

When a centennial view of the problem of land to population is taken the ethnic groups are likely to be more considerate to one another.

TABLE (I)

Population of Sri Lanka by Race in Census Years									
සියලු ජනවාර්ෂයන් Thousands									
රාශි විවේචන Race	1881	1901	1911	1921	1931	1946	1953	1971	1981
සියලු ජනවාර්ෂයන් All races	2,759.7	3,566.0	4,106.4	4,478.6	5,306.4	6,657.3	8,097.9	12,689.9	14,850,001
සියලු සිංහල සිංහල ජනවාර්ෂයන් Low-Country Sinhalese	1,846.6	1,458.3	1,716.9	1,927.1	2,216.2	2,902.5	3,469.5	5,425.8	10,985,666
කඳවුරු සිංහල සිංහල ජනවාර්ෂයන් Kandyan Sinhalese	..	872.5	998.6	1,089.1	1,256.8	1,718.0	2,147.2	3,705.5	
සියලු සිංහල සිංහල ජනවාර්ෂයන් Ceylon Tamils	687.2	951.7	528.0	517.3	598.9	733.7	884.7	1,424.0	1,871,535
ඉන්දියානු සිංහල සිංහල ජනවාර්ෂයන් Indian Tamils			531.0	602.7	818.5	780.6	974.1	1,174.6	825,233
සියලු සිංහල සිංහල ජනවාර්ෂයන් Ceylon Moors	184.5	226.0	233.9	251.9	289.6	373.6	464.0	828.3	1,056,972
ඉන්දියානු සිංහල සිංහල ජනවාර්ෂයන් Indian Moors			32.7	33.0	36.3	35.6	47.5	27.4	-
යුරෝපීය යුරෝපීය ජනවාර්ෂයන් Europeans	4.8	6.3	7.6	8.1	9.2	5.4	6.5	-	-
සිංහල සහ යුරෝපීය යුරෝපීය ජනවාර්ෂයන් Burghers and Eurasians	17.9	23.5	26.7	29.4	32.3	41.9	46.0	45.4	38,236
මලාය Malays	8.9	11.9	13.0	13.4	16.0	22.5	25.4	43.5	43,378
විදාහ Veddahs	2.2	4.0	5.3	4.5	5.2	2.4	0.8	-	-
නිවෙස නිවෙස ජනවාර්ෂයන් Others	7.5	9.7	12.7	22.0	27.4	41.1	32.2	15.5	23,931

SOURCE: STATISTICAL ABSTRACT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA

TABLE (II)

POPULATION BY RACE IN PERCENTAGES 1881-1981									
	1881	1901	1911	1921	1931	1946	1953	1971	1981
Sinhala	66.9	65.3	66.1	67.0	65.4	69.4	69.3	71.9	74.0
Ceylon Tamils	} 24.9	26.68	12.85	11.49	11.28	11.02	10.92	11.22	12.60
Indian Tamils			12.93	13.39	15.42	11.72	12.02	9.25	5.55
Ceylon Moors	} 6.9	6.39	5.69	5.59	5.45	5.61	5.72	6.52	7.11
Indian Moors			0.79	0.73	0.68	0.53	0.58	0.21	-
Europeans	0.2	0.17	0.18	0.18	0.17	0.08	0.08	-	-
Burghers + Eurasians	0.6	0.65	0.65	0.65	0.60	0.62	0.56	0.35	0.25
Malays	0.3	0.33	0.31	0.29	0.30	0.33	0.31	0.34	0.29
Veddahs	0.1	0.11	0.12	0.10	0.09	0.03	0.00	-	-
Others	0.2	0.27	0.30	0.48	0.51	0.61	0.39	0.12	0.16

In Recent Decades

When the British gradually introduced representative government in Ceylon by nominating Ceylonese members to the Legislative Council in the last century, the Tamils were well represented by capable persons from among their educated leaders: for instance by the Coomaraswamys and the Ponnambalam Arunachalam and Ponnambalam Ramathan brothers. During the last decades of the 19th century and first two decades of this century Sinhala, Tamil, Moor, Malay and Burgher leaders were together in their agitation for constitutional reforms. These leaders were British educated. They were persons with brown faces but mainly "white" minds - the type that Macaulay wished to generate in India: Indian in origin, British in mentality. These were agreed on their demands for greater participation in the powers of Government under British rule.

As self-government seemed to be within reach of the Ceylonese from the 1920s the differences between the Sinhalese and the Tamils began to grow. This cannot be interpreted as merely a question of personal power-seeking. The Tamil people and their leaders began to realize that self-government would mean the installation of a Sinhala hegemony over them, specially if the one-man one-vote principle of democracy was to be the method for choosing governments. They would then be permanently subject to Sinhala rulers. The Sinhala leaders, on the other hand, pledged justice and fair play to Tamils in an Independent Ceylon. They thus sought Tamil support for the cause of independence.

From the grant of internal self-government and general elections under universal suffrage in 1931 the problems of race came to the forefront, along with those of class. In 1931, of a State Council of 61 members, 50 were elected, 8 nominated by the Governor and 3 were officials. Of the 50 elected seats 38 were won by Sinha-

lese. In the first State Council 1931-36 there were Tamils among the chairmen of Executive Committees who formed the Board of Ministers. After the 1936 General Election the appointment to the seven Executive Committees was so manoeuvred as to elect Sinhala Chairmen for each of them. There was thus a pan-Sinhala Board of Ministers. This was considered helpful for negotiating Constitutional reforms with the British.

Due to the declaration of war in 1939 this State Council and Board of Ministers continued to function till the General Elections of 1947 under the Soulbury Constitution. Undoubtedly the Board of Ministers led first by Sir Baron Jayatilleke and later Mr. D.S. Senanayake could present a united front to the British and this may have advanced the grant of full dominion status and Independence in 1948. All the same this was a long period in which the Tamils were excluded from the effective exercise of political power as Cabinet Ministers, except for Mr. A Mahadeva, who became Minister of Home Affairs in 1942.

1. The Demand for 50:50

It was this experience that led Mr.G.G.Ponnambalam, then the undisputed leader of the Tamils, to demand parity of representation in the legislature and in the Cabinet of ministers for the Sinhala majority on the one side and all the minorities on the other. This was the famous demand for 50:50 in the late 1930s and 1940s. The Sinhalese unanimously opposed the proposal. The Tamil leaders thought of this as a means of preventing a Sinhala hegemony. The Sinhala reaction was that this was an indication of the Tamil attitude of asking for and expecting far beyond what their position in the country warranted.

The Soulbury Commission that visited Ceylon in the mid 1940s did not approve this demand. They however

provided for greater representation of the rural areas, and this would help the Tamils in the North and East and the Central provinces. The Soulbury Constitution had also constitutional safeguards in its well known section 29, against legislative discrimination against racial or religious minorities. This was to prevent the Sinhala majority using its parliamentary power to confer on the Sinhalese and Buddhists any advantage that was not conferred on the other races and religions. This limitation on the legislative power of parliament was said to be entrenched in the constitution. There was an appeal to the British House of Lords concerning violations of this safeguard. This situation lasted so long as Ceylon was a member of the British Commonwealth, i.e. till the declaration of the Republic of Sri Lanka on 22nd May 1972.

2. Demand for a Federal State : 1949-1972

In the first Parliament of Ceylon under the Soulbury Constitution Mr.G.G.Ponnambalam was a member of the Cabinet as Minister of Industries. Most of the Tamil leaders were with him in the Tamil Congress. One of the first acts after Independence in 1948 was to determine Ceylon's citizenship laws. In this process the vast majority of the Tamils of recent Indian origin, mainly on the plantations, were disenfranchised. This was due partly to Sinhala fears of the hill country losing its Sinhala identity, and partly to the upper class fears that the plantation workers would support the radical marxist parties.

In the General Elections of 1947 these plantation workers enjoying the franchise since 1931, elected seven Indian members to a Parliament of 101 members and had a considerable influence on the results of several other electorates. A consequence of the disenfranchisement of these people of recent Indian origin was an increase in the representation of Sinhalese in Parliament at the

expense of the Indian Tamils. The Sinhalese now came to hold 80% of the seats in the legislature. Thus the balance intended by the Soulbury formula was upset.

TABLE (III)

COMMUNAL DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS

	Sin.	Cey.Ta.	Mus.	In.Ta.	Others	Total	
State Council							
1931	38	3	1	2	2	48	4 elective seats vacant due to boycott in Jaffna
1936	50	8		2	1		
House of representative							
1947	68	13	6	7	1	95	
1952	75	13	6	0	1	95	
1956	75	12	7	0	1	95	
1960 (March)	123	18	9	0	1	151	
1960 (July)	122	18	11	0	1	151	=
1965	121	17	11	0	1	151	
1970	123	19	8	0	1	151	

leading Sri Lanka increasingly on the road to mob violence (cf: Tissa Balasuriya - "A Frustrated Community" in Social Justice May-June 1956) After 1956 there was a positive reluctance on the part of the Tamils in the North to learn Sinhala. Prior to that Sinhala was being taught in many schools there. Now Sinhala became a symbol of an oppressive imposition. This was similar to the reaction to Hindi in Tamilnadu.

In response to the continued demands of the Tamil leaders, the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam (B-C) Pact was signed in July 1957. Under it regional Councils were to be set up. In April 1958, Mr.S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike unilaterally abrogated the B-C Pact due to the pressure of Sinhala public opinion led and articulated by the Maha Sangha. Following this in May 1958 there was racial violence against the Tamils on an island-wide scale. Thousands of Tamils were taken to the Northern and Eastern provinces in commandeered ships and army protected convoys. The racial violence was mainly against the Tamils. This was the first nation-wide resort to violence on a large scale since the riots and martial law of 1915 under British Rule. (cf. Tarzie Vittachi : Emergency 58)

Mr.S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike made an attempt at reconciliation by having Parliament enact the Tamil Language (Special Provision) Act No 28 of August 1958 providing for the use of Tamil in the spheres of education, public examinations, official correspondence with the Tamil speaking people. These were however not brought into effect for many years as the required regulations under it were not passed. Their acceptance however served as a basis for future rapproachment. Mr. Bandaranaike's policy of "Sinhala Only" included a complementary approach of "with reasonable use of Tamil". But he was unable to give administrative effect to the latter.

The subsequent government of Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike (1960-65) insisted on the implementation of the

Official Language Act on 1st January 1961 without promulgating any regulations under the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958. The Language of the Courts Act of 1961 provided for the replacing of English by Sinhala in all courts of law. Proficiency in Sinhala was made a requirement for public servants appointed after 1956.

In 1961, when the Tamil people engaged in a non-violent campaign of civil disobedience at the Jaffna Kachcheri to obtain their language rights, they were dealt with violently by the defence forces, which were sent to the North at this stage. The army was thus entrusted with a political function in the interests of the Sinhala dominated Government. The Tamil political leaders were detained for some time. From 1960-65 the Government of Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike followed a policy that did not help resolve this national question.

The policy of "colonization" or settlement of families in the North-central and eastern regions of the country continued during the decades from 1931 onwards. This benefitted mainly the Sinhala people from the more densely populated South. The Tamils feared that this policy would convert their traditional homelands to ones with an increasing Sinhala proportion as in Amparai and Trincomalee. On the other hand the Sinhala people regarded the Tamil demands as an attempt to secure large tracts of sparsely populated land in the North and East solely for the use of Tamil colonists. A formula for the resolution of this issue of colonization was provided for in the B-C Pact of 1957 and the D-C Pact of 1965, but both these pacts were given up unilaterally by the Sinhala Governments. This still remains an important issue for settlement.

In 1965, the Federal Party turned to the U.N.P and participated in the Dudley Senanayake Government on an understanding that the Prime Minister would set up District Councils as agreed to in the Senanayake-Chelvanaya-

gam Pact. Mr. Dudley Senanayake enacted regulations under the Tamil Language Act of 1958 despite strong opposition to them by the opposition parties, the S.L.F.P, L.S.S.P, and the C.P. The L.S.S.P. and C.P. had been in favour of parity of status for Tamils upto 1964. In 1968, due to the vehemence of this opposition the Government abandoned its plan to have District Councils which were to have limited functions and to work under the direction and supervision of the Central Government. This was a great disappointment to the Federal Party. Its representative Mr.M. Tiruchelvam resigned from the Cabinet. Since that time there have been no Tamil Ministers in the Sri Lanka Government having the support of the major Tamil parties or of the majority of the Tamil people in the North and East.

At the General Elections of 1970 Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike was returned to power at the head of a coalition including the SLFP, LSSP and the C.P.. It proceeded to give Ceylon a new Constitution. The first Republican Constitution of 1972 removed the constitutional safeguards of Section 29(c) of the Soulbury Constitution against discrimination on the basis of race or religion. The section on fundamental rights, which was inserted instead, was not an adequate substitute as they were not justiciable. The judiciary was declared subordinated to the legislative. The Constitution enacted in Article 6 that "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by section 18 (1) (d)" Article 18 (1) (d) was an affirmation of the right of every citizen to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as well as to manifest his religion in worship, observance, practice and teaching. There was no mention of protection and fostering of other religions by the State. This was a clear neglect of the Hindu religion, which is even more ancient than Buddhism. The position of the Soulbury Cons-

titution was thus changed from non-discrimination in respect of religions to one of positive state favour of Buddhism and tolerance of other rights.

Further these fundamental rights "granted by Section 18" were not justiciable. The Constitution provided that "all existing law shall operate notwithstanding any inconsistency with the provisions of subsection (1) of this section (18). This ensured that the "Sinhala Only" Act of 1956 which had been contested in the courts under the previous Constitution was now made inviolate. This removed any hope of the Tamil people obtaining redress of their language grievances under the normal laws of the land. The regulations passed under the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act were to be regarded as subordinate legislation. Thus the position of the Tamils became worse under this first constitution drafted mainly by the Sinhala rulers. The Federal Party took up the position that the 1972 Constitution did not have the sanction of the Tamil people. These political developments led the TULF Tamil leaders to a point of greater exasperation. They begin to think that there was no hope of redress of their grievances in a united Sri Lanka.

During this time the competition for admission to the universities became acute, specially for the medicine and engineering faculties. From 1973 a scheme of standardization of marks for admission of students to the universities resulted in a progressive reduction of admission of students from the Tamil medium. This meant also a reduction in employment opportunities for Tamil youth in the higher echelons of the public and private sectors. The frustration of competent youth had led to the insurrection of 1971 in the Sinhala areas. A similar situation of frustration led Tamil youth a few years later to form an underground movement. Their discontent coincided with the gradual giving up of hope of legal solutions by their older political leadership.

In 1947, nine Tamils were killed during the 4th International Tamil Research Conference. The Police attacked the people at the conference. The Government did not hold an inquiry into the atrocities. This was perhaps the turning point which led some of the Tamil youth to give up there hope in peaceful campaign. A youth Sivakumaran who was apprehended for attempting to kill a police officer, siad to be involved in this tragedy, committed suicide. He became a symbol of the resistance of the Tamil youth. This event also contributed significantly to the internationalization of the struggle of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

3. Option of Thamil Eelam

It was in the mid 1970s that the Tamil peoples demands were radicalized in favour of an option for a separate sovereign state of Tamil Eelam. Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayagam resigned from Parliament on the issue of the 1972 Constitution. The Government delayed the holding of the by election for this seat. This further aggravated matters He was returned by an overwhelming majority when the by-election for Kankesanthurai was held two years later. This further convinced him of the support of the Tamil people for the struggle led by his Party.

In 1947 the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress and Ceylon Workers Congress formed the Tamil United Front to promote the overall Tamil cause. In 1975 this organization opted for a separate Tamil State and renamed itself the Tamil United Liberation Front. Though the CWC was not in favour of the separate state, the T.U.L.F. affirmed on the 14th May 1976 by its Vaddukoddai Resolution that its goal was the setting up of 'a separate, free, secular, sovereign socialist state of Tamil Eelam'. It contested the 1977 General Elections with "Tamil Eelam" as its objective and won 18 seats in Parliament. Mr. A. Amirthalingam became the Leader of the Opposition. Since then the

T.U.L.F. has claimed that they have a mandate from their people to set up a separate Tamil State and they are obliged to honour that mandate. Prior to 1977 those who contested any seat in the North on a separatist ticket were roundly defeated. The T.U.L.F. leadership declared that their means of achieving this goal were to be those of non-violence. They continued their struggle in Parliament and mainly by constitutional means, even though they did not accept the 1972 and 1978 constitutions.

In the meantime the more militant Tamil youth had taken to an armed struggle. They adopted guerilla tactics of attacking targets selected for political, security or financial purposes, e.g the killing of Alfred Duraiappah the S.L.F.P. Mayor of Jaffna and of police officers hot on the trail of the alleged assailants. The obnoxious regulations passed after the Duraiappah assassination enabled recourse to torture in order to obtain confessions. This in turn led to a hardening of youth unrest and revolt. Thus tensions had grown between the ethnic groups by the time of the general elections of 1977.

E. POSITIVE APPROACHES SINCE 1977

At the 1977 General Elections the United National Party under the leadership of Mr. J.R. Jayawardene stated clearly in its manifesto that it recognized the grievances of the Tamil people. "The lack of a solution to their problems has made the Tamil speaking people support even a movement for the creation of a separate State. In the interest of national integration and unity so necessary for the economic development of the whole country, the Party feels such problems could be solved without loss of time. The Party when it comes to power will take all possible steps to remedy their grievances in such fields as : 1. Education 2. Colonization 3. Use of Tamil Language 4. Employment in the public and semi-public Corporations.

We will summon an All Party Conference as stated earlier and implement its decisions."

It is surmised that the Tamil people, specially those outside the North, helped the U.N.P. to win the 5/6th majority in Parliament. Led by Mr. Thondaman the Leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress the plantation workers also strongly supported the U.N.P. Mr. Thondaman has recently stated that prior to the 1977 General Elections, representatives of the UNP, TULF and CWC met at his house to work out an electoral agreement and strategy.

The U.N.P. in power carried out certain measures to meet the Tamil demands : Tamil was made a national language and the language rights promulgated by the regulations of 1966 under the 1958 Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act were constitutionally guaranteed. These included the rights of Tamils to be educated, to correspond with Government institutions and to sit for public examination in their own language. Tamil could be used in courts of original jurisdiction in the North and East. Fundamental rights of citizens were made justiciable subject to certain reservations. In 1980 the Development Councils Act was passed. "Standardization" in admission to the Universities was given up and a new formula evolved whereby 30% of the admissions were to be on merit, 55% on a district basis and 15% for the less developed districts. The policies of the free economy permitted freedom of travel to all parts of the world. It gave more scope for Tamil business entrepreneurs, even though their farmers and small industrialists were unfavourably affected by the liberalization of imports.

While these are, by and large, positive contributions towards national harmony under difficult circumstances, there have been grave deficiencies in their implementation specially in regard to language rights, the ensuring of fundamental rights and the actual devolution of autho-

city to the District Development Councils. As Prof. Wilson has said these reforms have been "too little and too late". They have failed to satisfy Tamil aspirations. The frequent recurrence of thuggery and the violence of the police and armed forces have led the Tamils to a disillusionment with the hope of realizing their rights. The increase of Tamil militancy is a cause and effect of the failure to improve race relations since 1977.

The government's non-implementation of the promise to call an All Party Conference was a continuing source of distrust of the Government's genuine intention to resolve these issues beyond party politics. It is important that there is a general understanding of how the Tamils were pushed step by step to more radical demands due to their aspirations not being appreciated and positively responded to by the majority community in power. The first demand was for balanced representation in the Central Government - the 50:50 demand. When this was not conceded their goal was for a federal state which was to be a division of governmental powers between the Centre and the constituent States of the Federation. They came to this position in the 1950s but in earlier decades the Tamils were not for federalism when Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike proposed it in the late 1920s. When Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayagam first proposed Federalism he was defeated by the rival UNP candidate in 1952 in his home constituency of Kankesanthurai. By 1956 the Tamils were by and large with the Federal Party.

In spite of this they hoped for regional councils under the BC Pact in 1957-58 and for District Councils in 1965-68 under the DC Pact. Thus there has been a gap between their demands and what they were prepared to accept as a compromise.

The more recent demands for a separate sovereign State was born of their conviction that no compromise so-

lution was possible with the Sinhala majority concerning the division of powers at the Centre or through devolution of power to the provinces or regions.

By a contrary process the way in which the Tamil demands became more radical and more insistent also heightened Sinhala suspicions concerning the danger to the unity of the country. The Sinhala people tend to think that the Tamils are always asking too much, far beyond their due rights - being only about 12% of the population (i.e. excluding the plantation workers) As the Sinhala fears increase, their resistance gets hardened and, at some point, breaks out in uncontrollable violence.

Each time the Tamils feel the violence of the majority the more convinced they are that there is little hope of peaceful coexistence in one country and under one State. Thus the vicious spiral of violence gets aggravated at each stage.

Yet the very folly of violence also tends to bring about a realization that peaceful solutions must be found that respect the rights of all. The country as a whole is thus involved in this process of deciding our own destiny by a painful process of trial and error, of folly and hopefully ultimately wisdom.

F. RISE OF YOUTH MILITANCY AND CONSEQUENCES

Violence was unleashed in August 1977 on an island-wide scale mainly against the Tamils. This time the Tamil plantation workers were also attacked. There were about 50,000 refugees in several ad hoc camps set up in different cities. Some of these, fleeing from the estates and the South were settled in the North, particularly in the Vavuniya area. The Government and voluntary agencies cooperated in this.

From 1956 to 1977 the injured and the killed due to communal violence were mainly from among the Tamils. Some Sinhalese and Muslims also suffered on these occasions. The annual Report of the Inspector General of Police for 1977, published recently, gives the official figure of 131 killed in the communal riots of 15 August to 13 September 1977. Of these 120 were Tamils. There were 74 cases of rape; 1,141 of arson and 1,209 of looting according to this report. This is the officialy accountable figure. The actual numbers were probably much more.

After 1977 the militancy of the Tamil youth was more difinitely confirmed. They became better organized and more active in their armed attacks on persons, the police, banks, and later, isolated members of the armed forces.

Their attacks led to reprisals by the police and the defence forces. The Government for its part could not countenance the threat to law and order and had to increase the rigour of its repressive measures against these "Terrorists". Being unable to get at the hard core of the militant youth, the police and armed forces tended to victimize ordinary citizens. This further exasperated many of the ordinary Tamil population specially in the Jaffna Peninsula. During the past decade and particularly since 1977 we have seen a spiralling of violence on both sides: the youth and the forces of law and order, without a peaceful solution in sight. As the violence of the police and armed forces increased the influence of the mature politicians of the T.U.L.F. seems to have decreased. More and more people are beginning to think that there is no way out other than through the efforts of the "Terrorists" or liberation fighters. Since 1982 or so the northern "Tigers" have been operating more openly - even dealing with local corruption or coming out in the open in bigger numbers.

I. Understanding Tamil Youth Militants

A long term and fairly widespread phenomenon such as that of the Tamil youth militancy during nearly ten years cannot and should not be dismissed as mere lunacy, adventurism or misguided zeal. Prior to July 1983 government spoke in such terms regarding these "terrorists". Youth unrest is a feature common to many Asian countries. It is young men (and women) who changed the course of history in Mao's China, and in the Vietnam of Ho Chi Minh. It is young men of the Mukthi Bahini who walked with their gun in hand from North Bengal to Dacca to found the new state of Bangladesh. The youth, mainly student, unrest led to the fall of the dictator Syghman Rhee of South Korea. President Sukarno had serious youth problems on his hands before his fall in 1965. The unrest of the youth is often an expression of forces at work in a given society. The youth may have the foolhardiness or audacity to dare difficult things, but this cannot be understood without reference to the overall social context.

The militant Tamil youth, like the young Sinhala insurgents of 1971, have a message for the rest of society. The decade long endurance and calculated strategy of the so-called "Terrorists" implies a certain determination based on a deep conviction. There are similarities and differences between these two revolts. The April 1971 insurgents were almost wholly Sinhala Youth rebelling against a government elected with a clear majority among the Sinhala people. Even Sinhala villages were by and large not with the insurgents. The towns were definitely against them. On the other hand the Tamil people specially in the North have been sympathetic to the cause of their young militants, even when they disapproved of violence as a method.

The 1971 insurgents hoped to capture State power by a sudden and quick attack on the police stations and

the defence positions on the State. They believed in capturing State power at the Centre. The Tamil militants have a different goal and a different strategy. They do not want State power in the whole country. They want a separate State in the areas they consider to be the traditional Tamil homelands. Their means are violence of a determined long term nature. They operate as Urban Guerillas as well as from the villages and hinterland forests. They are more sure of the support of neutrality of the Tamil public due to sympathy or fear. They have grown gradually into a hitherto effective striking force in the North and East.

Traditionally the North has been an area of well disciplined, peaceful and hard working people. Through the intense labour of their hands they have developed the rather inhospitable soil to be a source of regular agricultural income. By a determined devotion to study they have advanced educationally and consequently also in employment specially in the professions and the public service. It has to be remembered that the Tamil youth as such were not violent in 1956, 1958 throughout the 1960s, in 1971 and up to 1974.

Now for the first time in centuries some of the youth of the North have taken to armed struggle in the form of organized sporadic attack on selected objectives. This has given a new turn to public life in the country. It is bewildering not only the police and armed forces there, but even the population at large in these areas. The Sinhala people of the South hardly realize the depth of the frustration that has led the Tamil youth to such extreme positions.

A large group of persons do not normally resort to armed violence unless there are strong reasons persuading them to it. After all these youth themselves live in continuous danger of their lives. There is a price on their

heads. One million rupees have been offered even for hard information that leads to their arrests. Why have they come to the persuasion that it is better to risk their lives for a cause than seek to live peacefully? Why are they not enamoured of the conditions of the open economy that give them more opportunities of travel and self-employment in areas like trade, transport, tourism, construction or migration abroad?

If we look more intensely at the recent history of our country we might understand some reasons for their resort to violence as the only practical and honourable way out of the sad situation of the Tamil people as seen by them. One reason for their resort to armed struggle is their conviction that they cannot obtain relief of their grievances by merely parliamentary discussions with any pro-Sinhala Government. These youths born after 1950 have always lived under a Sinhala regime. They have not known any other government except the foreign rule from the South. They have, all their lives, been second class citizens in their own homeland. They have been incapable of contributing to decision making even for developing their own talents and their lands. They feel discriminated in education and employment, in development policies, and unable to do anything about it. The educational policies since the 1950s have segregated the Sinhala and Tamil medium students. Some text books encourage racism among both groups. The bulk of the Sinhala and Tamil youth do not know each other. They grow up in two different and even divergent historical traditions.

Ever since Independence they have seen their leaders pleading eloquently in Parliament, agitating peacefully in the public places and suffering patiently at the hands of the mob and in prison without any improvement in their status. Each pro-Sinhala Government has made promises which it has been unable or unwilling to fulfil due to political pressures of the majority. On the contrary the

Constitutions of 1972 and 1978 have conferred a special position to Buddhism which is not given to Hinduism, an even more ancient religion of the people of this country. The constitutional safeguards of fundamental rights have not proved effective specially against the violence of the police and the armed forces. The Constitutions of 1972 and 1978 are regarded as not having the approval of the Tamil people. They depend on force for their enforceability. They are a form of legalized violence. The TULF leaders in opting for a sovereign state of Eelam raised hopes and aspirations in the youth. Even if the older TULF leaders are prepared to compromise on this, these youth militants think armed struggle is the path to Eelam. They are more idealistic, if less realistic.

An even deeper reason for the youth to turn to armed struggle is the humiliation they are forced to undergo when they see children, women, and men of their race living in continual insecurity for life and property. Young men are profoundly enraged at the sight of the rape to which their sisters and mothers have been subjected during communal disturbances. These youth have been born and grown up in the period after the communal holocaust of 1958. This is part of the sad historical memory of the Tamil people. The memory conveyed by oral tradition may be even more terrible than the reality through which people lived. Cruel August 1977 re-enacted these horrors. It gave the new generation of youth an idea of how barbaric racism can turn out to be. Is it surprising that they think they must be able to live in their own lands, under their own rulers, and not be subject to alien police, armed forces, and thuggery?

The efforts at reaching solutions by parliamentary dialogue failed from 1956-1977. They have therefore lost confidence in a democratic rule in which a dominant racial majority can permanently rule them to their disadvantage. Democracy has no meaning if a permanent majority does not

respect the fundamental rights of all including the minorities. The radical Tamil youth are the voice of frustrated Tamil nationalism asking for a chance to live a decent life as free human beings equal in rights and dignity with all others in this country.

Since 1977 the situation has become worse with the gradual escalation of violence on both sides. In 1979, the Government declared it would wipe out terrorism in six months. Emergency was declared. Several Tamil youths were killed after being taken away from their houses. Even a Parliamentary Select Committee did not exculpate the police and defence forces. Yet there was no further inquiry.

The District Development Council Law of 1980 was a decided advance on the earlier position. Yet the operation of the DDCs left much to be desired.

In 1981, the U.N.P. candidate Mr. Thiagarajah and 2 policemen were killed by "terrorists" during the campaign for the DDC Elections. At this stage the defence forces in Jaffna went berserk. They burnt the Jaffna 95,000 book Public Library and the public markets in Jaffna, Chunnakam and K.K.S. Once again the government did not take strong action against the miscreants. This act, which has been described as vandalism, deeply shocked the people especially of Jaffna.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (P.T.A.) has been used since 1979 to round up and detain Tamils on the suspicion of terrorism or involvement with "terrorists". In November 1982, there were large scale demonstrations in the North, and East when members of the clergy and university teachers were arrested under the P.T.A.

In 1983, both the "terrorist" attacks and the arrests by defence forces continued unabated. The Govern-

ment tightened its measures for dealing with "terrorists", including the authority for police officers above the rank of ASP to dispose of dead bodies without a judicial process. The army was also to be given this power. Thus the rule of law was virtually suspended, in the North and East when the outburst of July 1983 took place with an unparalleled anti-Tamil violence.

2. Prevention of Terrorism ACT (PTA)

The powers of arrest, search, seizure and interrogation given to police officers by the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1979 has led to much abuse by the police and armed forces. Upto now, taking cover under this draconian law, the armed forces and police have harassed many Tamils who had not been charged with any offence. There is ample evidence to show that in practice the position is even worse than what the law allows. The following are instances:-

- * Identity of persons who carry out arrests is not known.
- * Members of the family are not informed of the arrest.
- * When arresting, persons are not informed of the grounds on which they are being arrested.
- * Relatives and lawyers have been refused access to persons in custody.
- * In the event of the absence of the wanted person, other members of the family are taken as hostages.
- * Torture and confessions under torture.
- * Detention for long periods without trial.

Amnesty International has condemned the Prevention of Terrorism Act. In Sri Lanka, Human Rights Organiza-

tions like the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), and the Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) have expressed concern at the violation of human rights and the excesses of the security personnel. Many political parties, including parties with predominantly Sinhala membership, have called for the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Over a hundred persons have been arrested, and many of them subjected to inhuman treatment in army camps and police stations. Torture of a brutal nature has become a rather normal way of dealing with persons arrested under the PTA, as is evidenced by dozens of affidavits of the victims. The arrests of Christian clergymen, a University lecturer and his wife in November 1982, led to widespread protests in the North and East. There are stories of their having been tortured brutally till they signed the required confessions.

These stories of police brutality are wellknown among the public of the North. Each person who is thus given the "treatment" somehow mentions it to a few others inspite of severe threats against the spread of such information. Such stories spread through the grapevine of the people's history of terror. Even the names of individual police officers who tortured are known. Each account of such torture makes even ordinary people more convinced that there can be no solution to their problems through mere peaceful and polite requests to the Government. Even those who disapprove violence, tend to think that the "Boys" are the only persons capable of defending the self-respect of the Tamil nation. The failure of the government to bring to book police officers who tortured those in custody, or participated in the burning of the Public Library and the markets in Jaffna and Chunakam in 1981 adds further credence to the view that the prevailing law and order is exercised in favour of alien rulers. Such brutality and vandalism on the part of the

forces of law and order tend to push people towards the "Tigers" as the only hope of redress of such evils.

The Courts of Law of the country too have not been able to be an effective defence of the fundamental rights of the people thus victimized. This is due to several reasons. The Constitution Art 126 (2) requires that such infringements of fundamental rights should be brought before the Courts within a month of the incident. But the victims may be kept in detention much longer than one month after the assaults and their confessions. The P.T.A. places on the accused the burden of proof of the involuntariness of the confessions made under detention, even if the only evidence against the accused is from his own confession. The accused cannot get evidence against torturers as he is often alone and isolated. Relatives and lawyers have no access to him for weeks on end. The recent incursions into the independence of the judiciary worsened the situation. All these tend to make the police more brutal in their methods of investigations. This in turn makes them more unpopular. They are thus rendered easier targets of the "terrorists". This increased the police insecurity, and their revengeful fury when any of them is attacked.

This torture by the police has not led to the capture of the "terrorists" or a reduction of "terrorism" in the North. The youth have also escalated their campaign of violence. On the other hand the violence of terrorists has led to the armed forces resorting to more sophisticated methods of combating them. Mean while both the people of the North as well as the police and defence forces suffer many casualties. The cost of these operations increases. People become more brutal, human life insecure and easily taken away. There is no real law and order, but the law of the jungle, without any foreseeable end through these means. This is no climate for a meaningful economic development. Investment in the North is

discouraged. Frustration of the Youth grows and leads to more of them opting to join the "freedom fighters".

It is important to note that Terrorism in the North is a result of the violence by the armed forces, the police and Sinhala people against the Tamils. During four decades the Tamil leaders attempted to bring about reforms through non-violent means. The youth in the North are resorting to violence because they are convinced that their non-violent leaders have failed. In exasperation they have concluded that their hope lies only in a separate State of Eelam to be set up, if need be, by terrorist methods. Much as we dislike violence, we have to be honest to admit that it is the violence of the State and the thuggery against the Tamils - that have sent the youth to such options. It cannot be dismissed as madness, nor is it wise to try to overcome them by mere force. A more enlightened political approach is required to ensure a peaceful and just solution.

3. Violence No Solution

In the present situation there is no solution by violence, be it the selective violence of the liberation terrorists, the indiscriminate arrests and retaliation by the forces of the State or mob-violence and looting anywhere. The position is different from the 1971 insurrection in which the attempt was at a sudden capture of state power by the insurgents. Then the people as a whole were not on one side, in fact in most cases the majority were not with the insurgents. Hence it was a matter of time before they were rounded up, after the failure of the first putsch. The armed forces could fight them as they sought to control whole areas. They had no place to retreat except to the seas and the jungle. Further the insurgents were not well trained and well-armed. Internationally they had no support. Both the Eastern and the Western countries supported the Government. India

supplied armed forces to defend strategic places like Katunayake Airport.

In the North, perhaps learning from the experience of 1971 and of the guerilla warfare elsewhere, the youthful combatants are not attempting to capture state power; at least this is not a short term goal. They are not being opposed by the masses of the population. The people are not giving assistance to the defence forces for their capture. This may be due to a tacit support for them, or a fear of reprisals, or both. Many people admire them even when they deplore their violence. The youthful combatants represent the unbending will of the Tamil people who do not want to cow down before force exercised by an alien power. Many feel that the respect that the North has earned from the Government is due, in recent years, more to the struggle of the youth than to the peaceful demands of the elder generation. Mao's statement that power flows from the barrel of the gun seems unfortunately true in our present situation, even though it does not necessarily mean justice, and certainly not peace.

The method of the freedom fighters/terrorists is presently, an attack on selective targets, sometimes wounding persons, sometimes killing them. They have killed some members of the police force, particularly when they were hot on the trail of the youth. They have attacked banks for money, police stations for arms, informants considered dangerous by them, and politicians who they think are collaborationists with the ruling powers. The bulk of the Northern population, much as they dislike violence, do not seem to fear these youth or "the Boys" as they are called with a fondness mingled with admiration. It is claimed that the Northern youth militants have not hurt any Sinhala persons because they were Sinhala. If they attacked police and defence forces they did so, as attacks on the agents of an oppressive State. Thus

they attacked Tamils and Sinhala. In fact up to July 1983 the majority of those killed by the Tamil militants were Tamils.

The Northern "Boys" are apparently well-trained in the type of action they undertake. They go for selected targets, attacked with intervals of time. They have the initiative in determining where, when and with what means they will launch an attack. They use physical force as well as psychological pressure on the people and the defence forces. Due to such strategies they are often taken unawares.

These young militants are so sure that the local inhabitants will not "betray" them that they go on bicycles in twos and threes, attack their target and vanish into the neighbourhood before the security forces can capture them. Occasionally they hijack a passing vehicle. Upto May 1983 they escaped arrest. The defence forces do not seem to know their whereabouts, despite four years of intense activity since the famous order of the President in mid 1979 to wipe out terrorism in six months. They have also the Northern seas with Tamil Nadu within a few hours reach from here. India does not support terrorists. However, the people of Tamil Nadu are very similar to those of the North of Sri Lanka and are not disposed to surrender them to the public authorities here.

The "Boys" have brought the situation in the North to such a point that the Sri Lankan police are frightened to venture out after dusk, from their heavily guarded police stations. Most of the North is thus unpoliced by night, except if a whole contingent of police go out well-armed. This leaves room for robbery and this in turn can create a confusion between robbers and "terrorists". The morale of the police force and armed forces in the North is admittedly low. Several of their men have been killed during the past few years. Posthumous awards and

compensation to families are no encouragement to bravery against the "terrorists" who cannot be easily found out. The Government's defence forces cannot fight a guerilla war with conventional methods in a land they are unfamiliar with and among a people whose language they are unable to speak.

The police are sent to the North often against their will. Many consider the North a "punishment" area. They go there because they cannot avoid it without a danger of losing their jobs or promotions. The Tamil policemen are in a particularly difficult situation. They are torn between conflicting loyalties; to the government they are trained to serve, and to their own "Boys" who are considered by the people as struggling for their Tamil nationalist cause. In some way they face also a greater risk of attack by the "terrorists", specially if they are successful in their investigations. A number of them have already been killed by the militant youth.

4. Brutalizing of the Security Forces

When the police are attacked by the "terrorists" and are unable to get at any of the attackers, they are deeply humiliated. They are provoked to retaliation. They tend to go "berserk" as was mentioned in Parliament by even government spokesmen in June 1981 when the Jaffna Public Library was set fire to. On other occasions police officers have said that when they are attacked by others they react ferociously; they are like "mad dogs", said one of them.

The higher officers cannot control the rank and file policemen. This is a phenomenon that needs inquiry. There seems to be some psychological traits in the members of the police force that tend to make them behave thus towards members of the public. Their pride is so hurt on such occasions that they resort to indiscriminate

violence on members of the public. They tend to react thus partly due to the traditional hostility of racial chauvinism that the media and the school system tend to foster.

Such a behaviour on the part of the members of the police force tends to further antagonize the Northern public. It becomes worse when many of the policemen in the North are Sinhalese who do not know the language and way of life of the people. They cannot fraternize with the people even during their free time. They are also like a section of an army of occupation. This further alienates them from the people, and the people from them.

This is perhaps even more true of the armed forces. Many of the members of the armed forces sent to the North are rather young, in fact too young to be handed a gun and be invested with the authority to shoot "terrorists" attacking them or on the run. The morale of the army in the North too has been, admittedly low. They tend to overact to the violence of the Tamil militants. On the other hand some of them think the laws of the country hamper them from eradicating terrorism once and for all. They even consider themselves to be easy targets and prey to the "enemy" while they themselves are answerable to their officers and before the tribunals of the Courts and of public opinion. This led to a group of soldiers from the Raja Rata regiment having to be dismissed due to their tendency to disobey orders in their enthusiasm to retaliate by strong violent methods against the Tamil militants. Sinhala public opinion too tends to be sympathetic to these soldiers in the North due to their ambiguous and unenviable situation.

The Police Force in the North has many Tamils, specially after the Government - TULF dialogues following the 1981 troubles. But the armed forces are mainly Sinhala and this tends to harden ethnic prejudices on both sides and aggravate the conflicts in the country.

There is no hope of victory for either side if extreme solutions are sought. By merely sporadic and selective terrorist attacks a separate State of Eelam cannot be set up or maintained. The Sri Lankan armed forces are too powerful for that. Therefore, other than with foreign interference, Tamil Eelam as sovereign state is not likely to be realized. On the other hand, the defence forces cannot control terrorism in the North without the active support of the people there. That support will not be forthcoming if the government merely resorts to the strong arm tactics of repression. The P.T.A. has in effect been counter-productive. It has increased both legal and illegal terrorism.

Even pro-government commentators now admit that such indiscriminate violence against the youth and general public of the North by the police and armed forces has actually contributed to the strength of the liberation fighters called "terrorists". During ten years their numbers seem to have grown, their striking power has been manifested in different parts of the North. They seem to be popular with masses of the people. They have even taken on tasks such as the reduction of corruption and settling of local conflicts. There are however serious divisions among the different groups involved in armed struggle. This had led to internecine conflicts among them.

At each stage during the past six years the authority of the defence forces has been strengthened to exterminate terrorism. First there was the law proscribing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Act of 1978; this was superseded by the PTA (Temporary Provisions) in 1979. In 1982 the PTA was made the permanent law of the land. Now it is supported by the police power to dispose of dead bodies without inquest. The country is thus in a situation of virtual martial law. The democratic fabric of our society is being replaced by the laws of war. This is presently limited to the Northern problem. Unless this

escalation of violence is replaced by mutual understanding and effective peaceful solutions, it is only a matter of time before this spreads to the whole country.

While the Government has the right and duty to maintain peace (with justice) it would be a mistake to think that this is merely or largely a question of military strategy. The modernization of arms, the tightening of the laws, and the sophistication of the "intelligence" backed by a racist use of mass media cannot overcome the causes of the Tamil people's discontent, or fully check the armed militancy of the Tamil youth. In a sense the police and the armed forces are among the least equipped to deal with this problem in a human and humane manner. They may frighten the armed youth, they may dominate the people, but they cannot win their sympathy and loyalty. As the President has lately remarked the problem of youth violence in the North cannot be resolved without the support of the people there.

5. Internationalizing of Issues

The youth have contributed to the "internationalising" of the struggle of the Tamil people for Eelam. The repression by the Government has also helped in this. In fact this is the first major Sri Lankan issue that has had an international attention for several years. In many countries of the world there is a pro-Tamil lobby that campaigns against the repressive measures of the Government. This is a source of considerable embarrassment to Sri Lankan rulers, who hitherto could afford to preach non-violence to the rest of the world on international platforms. If this struggle is internationalized to the extent of major super powers being involved in it, we may have in Sri Lanka an unfortunate bifurcation of the country as in East and West Germany or North and South Korea.

The concern of many expatriate Tamil groups living in other countries has both helpful and baneful effects. They can be helpful in bringing pressure on the Sri Lankan government both directly and indirectly through human rights movements in those countries. On the other hand being outside the scene of events their assessment of issues can be more subject to hearsay, selective information and traditional prejudice. Not facing the dangers of local violence they may tend to encourage groups to violent methods without giving adequate thought to the unfortunate spiral of violence. Living in affluent circumstances they are able to provide funds to groups and causes which may have goals that are more divisive and disruptive of the country.

While the exaggerated versions of injustice publicized in foreign media do not find sympathy with the government, the government's own propaganda in other countries undertaken through its diplomatic missions also tends to be less than the full truth of the situation. Both these approaches tend to unfortunately worsen the relations between Sinhala and Tamil groups abroad. In this sense too the local conflict is internationalized by Sri Lankans abroad. Sinhala groups living abroad have also begun their own campaigns of propaganda in their places of residence. Sometimes this is related to their political party loyalties in Sri Lanka.

Fortunately there are also Sri Lankan groups abroad interested in peaceful and just solutions to our problems.

PART II

REFLECTIONS ON JULY 1983

The General political background to the breakdown in the relationships between the Government and the T.U.L.F., the security forces of the State and the Tamil youth militants and consequently between the Sinhala and Tamil races has been discussed in the first chapter. By June 1983 the situation was ripe for a major explosion in Sri Lanka. The escalation of violence and counter-violence led to a position in which the leadership at the Government level too were expressing their exasperation concerning the situation. The President of the Republic publicly stated that his efforts to overcome "Terrorism" in the North had failed. His interviews with the reporters of the B.B.C. published in the Ceylon Daily News of 25th July, 1983 and with the Daily Telegraph, given a few days before the July disturbances, were frighteningly ominous.

Each day the situation was worsening in May, June July. The activities of the militant youth in the North were providing headlines almost daily to the newspapers specially to those which were less concerned about discretion in this regard. The censorship exercised by the Competent Authority appointed by the Government was performed with as much concern for the Government's policy and image as for peace and harmony in the country. The newspapers of July 1983 bear witness to the rapidly deteriorating situation.

The match that ignited the fuse was the ambush of the night of Saturday July 23rd in the North when thirteen Sinhala soldiers were killed in one blow by the Tamil you-

th militants. The defence forces in the North ran amok on the 24th morning; they killed about 40 Tamils - mainly young men taken at random.

On the 24th evening the bodies of the 13 Sinhala soldiers were brought for burial to the Kanatte Cemetery in Colombo. Their names were announced in the public media on Sunday and Monday. No information whatsoever was given of the retaliatory violence of the armed forces. On 24th night at about 8 p.m. the crowds that gathered at Kanatte, for the funerals became restive and uncontrollable. They went on the rampage against Tamils and Tamil property till the early hours of the 25th.

From the dawn of the 25th Colombo was in flames. Squads of goons were going systematically from street to street attacking Tamil people and property. The police and defence forces were unable to check them. Some of them were unwilling to do so. Still others encouraged the ravaging mob. It is said that some of the security forces participated in the violence.

Law and order broke down first in Colombo and subsequently in many parts of Sri Lanka where Tamils lived as a minority. The Government imposed a curfew from Monday 2 p.m. to Wednesday dawn. But it was more effective in keeping the peaceful indoors than in preventing the violent from their marauding raids.

It was only on Thursday the 29th that a Government spokesman, the President himself, spoke to the nation on Television. His message unfortunately came across as an excuse for a righteous wrath of the Sinhala people. He announced early legislation to make the demand for Tamil Eelam illegal. This was enacted in the subsequent week as the 6th Amendment to the 1978 Constitution.

Friday 29th July was one of the worst days in our history. A rumour was spread that Eelam "Tigers" had attacked Colombo. Many people panicked and ran in fear. Others began to murder Tamils indiscriminately, mercilessly and inhumanly. It was only in the subsequent week that the position was gradually brought under control.

Over 100,000 Tamils entered refugee camps. Several thousands of houses, factories, workshops, shops, boutiques and vehicles belonging to Tamils were destroyed in this senseless but planned violence. Even six months after these events the Tamil people have not recovered their sense of security. They have not thought it worthwhile or safe to try to repair their houses. About 30,000 or more are unemployed due to worksites being destroyed. Tourism fared very badly from August 1983. The damage to the country in economic, political and moral terms is incalculable.

We are discussing here the nature of this conflagration. What were its causes? Who were the agents and beneficiaries of this inhuman arson, loot and murder?

Can Sri Lanka survive as one single nation after the communal holocaust of May - August 1983? Will it? On what conditions? What is it that enabled Sri Lanka to have relative ethnic tranquility between 1958-1977? Are the changes of policy in 1977 a factor which helped bring about the unparalleled violence of 1983? Are there any characteristics of Sri Lankan social evolution which can be relevant to and help in realizing ethnic peace with justice? These are some of the issues that are discussed in this paper which was first presented as a contribution to the Marga Institute Dialogue on "National Identity and Ethnicity in a Plural Society" in November 1983.

I pay more attention here to the post 1977 developments; however it is necessary to keep in mind that there

is a certain trend line of developments in our history from the 1960s to 1970s. Secondly while I evaluate critically some of the trends of the present regime, I am not arguing for one or the other party or person. I am concerned with the issues and trends rather than the personalities and parties as such.

Thirdly if I stress the relation of the open economy to the present crisis, it is not that there are no grave problems in socialist economies. They have theirs'; we have however to deal with ours; and since 1977 we have a policy package called an "open economy".

A. FOR UNDERSTANDING JULY 1983

To try to understand the catastrophe of July 1983 we must reflect on the widely plural nature of the Sri Lankan society. Our plurality involves several religions, ideologies, political parties, peoples organizations in addition to different ethnic groups and the two sexes. The issues involved in this connection include:-

- a) the political values and structures: the state, the nation, the constitutions.
- b) the economy its principles, policies and priorities.
- c) the social values and relationships
- d) Moral and religious life and tone of our society. Our spirituality. What is ultimate in our society?
- e) the youth phenomenon and the defence forces.
- f) Sri Lanka's international relations given our type of economy, and political options.

I wish to place all these alongside the ethnic factors. The 1983 eruption of violence has been in relation to the ethnic groups. I would like to ask whether there is a more serious breakdown in our society in relation to our overall society which affect our whole way of

life. As there has been an escalation of violence since 1977 we can ask whether these social forces and conflicts have aggravated since 1977; and whether the resolution of the ethnic problem will terminate our societal crisis; and whether the ethnic issues can be dealt with adequately in isolation without taking into account the political, economic, social and moral issues which are at stake in our overall societal crisis!

Is the aggravation of the ethnic conflict a consequence of the general social, economic, moral and political situation? Or is the ethnic relationship our main problem, and can this be dealt with in isolation? At the present time however we must give an urgent priority to the ethnic issue as it is clearly the point of breakdown of our social fabric; but we must do so with an awareness of the background of our general societal evolution and of the ramifications of the ethnic problem itself. This is clearly necessary at least in our analytical studies, even if in practice we may be well advised to deal with the problems both individually and separately should it be so possible and necessary. If on the other hand all the other factors are inextricably linked to the ethnic issues, then we must have a package of solutions in which these others are provided for. The failure to deal with the overall societal issues may result in conflicts in the South of Sri Lanka which may make the resolution of Northern issues intractable. We should study these problems to understand our situation better, and this can influence our line of action also.

1. A Communal Problem: The first point of view is that this is mainly a communal problem in which the ethnic tensions and rivalries were heightened by the demand for a separate state of Tamil Eelam and the recourse to violence and counter-violence by both sides. The escalating spiral of violence led to the July explosion of accumulated frus-

trations on both sides. Within this there are problems of

- a) language
- b) education
- c) employment
- d) land distribution

These are four major areas of dispute concerning which the Sinhala and Tamil peoples have different perceptions and different demands. In the resultant tension there is the problem of 'security' of the armed forces and of the police from attacks by the militant youths, of the security of the people of the North and East from the excesses of these forces of law and order. All these relate to the question of the devolution of power and of the relationship of the North and the East to the Central Government and the rest of the country. The delay in finding a satisfactory political solution to these issues aggravated the conflict. Due to the killings of their personnel in the North, the police and the armed forces were more than remiss in maintaining law and order during that week of mass violence.

2. A Leftist Conspiracy: is a second point of view. It is contended that given the ethnic tensions, the Left parties: the JVP, the NSSP and the CP conspired to embarrass, if not overthrow, the Government through these disturbances. The Government put forward this view: that these Left parties had a plan, as was indicated by the pattern and spread of the violence. They wanted to upset and destabilize the Government because the economic policies of the Government were very successful. The plan had three stages: first a Sinhala-Tamil riot, second Sinhala-Muslim clash and third Buddhist-Christian conflict. With that the Government would find it impossible to continue. These parties could not achieve power through the peoples votes,

as shown by the Presidential elections, the Referendum and the by-elections of May 1983. They were trying to achieve through violence what they could not realize by democratic means. Some of the groups that failed in the insurrection of 1971 were attempting violence once again. The success of the open economy prevented a breakdown of the supplies of essential goods, and prevented food riots which were hoped for by the conspirators. A certain foreign country and its embassy in Sri Lanka were said to be involved in this conspiracy.

This was the point of view put forward by the Government. These parties were therefore proscribed. Some of their leaders are in detention (without trial still) some are in hiding or have disappeared. The C.P. detainees have been released without charges being made against them. Investigation concerning this conspiracy is said to be continuing.

This hypothesis takes into account the whole societal configuration, and not merely the ethnic factors. This is the news that was propagated abroad also through our government channels. The Left Parties are thus discredited as racist chauvinists and agents of loot, arson and murder.

3. A Right Wing Plan ; A third view, put forward by these three Left parties and some others, is that the Government policies were not succeeding in economic life, in the political field and in controlling Northern youth militants through the armed forces. Given the ethnic tensions, the Government or pro-Government groups were interested in provoking a little trouble. This would enable the Tamil economic power in the South to be destroyed. It would teach the Tamils everywhere a lesson viz. that others too could resort to violence. The Government could thus stabilize its authoritarian power and divert popular attention from socio-economic difficulties.

This charge was made in parliament and in the statements of several political parties. They give some reasons indicating the Government's complicity, such as the way news was censored and announced on the 24th and 25th July. The killings of the 13 Sinhala soldiers on the 23rd night was published in full with their names, but the retaliatory killing of about 40 Tamil persons in the North by the armed forces was not announced till several weeks later. The killing of 52 political prisoners in the Colombo jails on two occasions is also adduced in favour of this view. The behaviour of the police and defence forces in the last week of July 1983 is said to be partly due to such a plan.

A charge in this connection is that persons who attempted the coup in 1962 have now found their way to places of power and influence and are now trying to carry through a right wing take over of power. Unfortunately, for them, it is said, the violence went beyond what the country could tolerate. This view too stresses that the present crisis is much more than an ethnic conflict.

4. A general breakdown of society : That the total economic package of 1977 (which in some ways continued some of the trends of 1970-77) has not worked out satisfactorily, that the political system has also led to situations of discontent and repression. It is said that the ethnic conflict burst within this general breakdown of society. There is said to have been a worsening of social conditions as well as of the moral fibre of the peoples as a whole.

Yet there is value in taking up the position that the solution to the ethnic problems must be found in the first instance and that separately without confusing it with other issues. To do otherwise is to prevent an early solution to this most grave issue. This view may be accommodated along with the second hypothesis of a left-wing conspiracy.

If however the problem of our catastrophe is more generic and there has been a breakdown of values, relationships and structures in moral, social, economic and political life in the country as a whole it may be asked whether we are facing the issues adequately if we do not consider these also. The question is how deep is our crisis and how inter-related are these factors. Is our crisis one of relating to only the communal relations of the past few decades, or is it also one caused by our socio-cultural, and politico-economic life of the past 2-3 decades?

The issue was similar in 1971. We may consider the 1971 insurrection merely as an issue of a youth revolt due to a lack of provision for them, or as a sign of the failure of a total social system to meet people's aspirations.

In any case the ethnic issue is and has been used to obtain overall political power by successive governments; it has an impact on the economy, and on social and psychological tensions.

5. Foreign Interests : A fifth consideration has to be added to all these aspects. There are claims of interference by the interested foreign groups e.g. the C.I.A. and the U.S. led Western alliance, the KGB and the socialist powers, and the special concern of India. India is interested for several reasons: - because of people of recent Indian origin in Sri Lanka, the Indian business interests, the particular link with Tamil Nadu, and the Indian Central Government policy of the balance of power in the Indian Ocean region. The Super power conflict in the Indian Ocean attracts attention to Sri Lanka specially due to the Trincomalee harbour.

In fact our own crisis has led to India being able to exercise a major influence on our domestic policies and to some extent on our foreign alliances.

Such profound conflicts make us question deeply our way of life - the foundations of our society, of our relationships as peoples, and to the world society as a whole.

Our crisis is very grave, not only because the Sinhala people hit the Tamils, but also because we have had ten years of youth unrest in the North. People never take up to a fight and sacrifice their life unless they are convinced that there is something gravely wrong in society. This is true of the youth insurrection of 1971; and much more in the present youth rebellion in the North. This is a calculated determined blow at the established authority. There is something basically wrong with a society in which many of its young people prefer to be on the roads, in the mountains and the hills, when they take an option that may have no general acceptance in their homes, and in which they cannot get married, settle down and have a normal family life, when they prefer to be in prison than in freedom and to die rather than live. This is a negative vote which they are giving with their blood and with their lives against the type of society to which they are born and in which they are compelled to live. In this situation we must ask ourselves what has gone wrong with our country.

I am saying this not because of the methods they use, or because of their success or failure, but because violence in this sense is a indication of some fundamental disorder in our society. We have then to ask what are the problems that have led to this situation. It is the truth concerning this that will free us from this crisis, and not scapegoats, smokescreens, legitimizations and rationalizations. There is a fundamental level of self-questioning we must face together. This is a study which the media controlled by the dominant establishment will hardly foster with the required objectivity.

B. A CRISIS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

It would seem to be that the reality is that as a country we have not resolved some of the principal problems of our identity:- are we one society, one nation, or more than one? What is the type of economy we desire? What are the social and moral values on which we are going to base our common life in this island?

We are de facto under one State and one Government. But a State or Government does not necessarily mean one society, one people, one nation, one community. A state can be and is constituted ultimately on the power of physical coercion. That is the final power behind its laws and its concept of order. The forces of law and order, of defence, the prisons and the guillotine are the final arbiters of de facto power in a State. A society including a nation is a body of persons who are agreed on a common purpose and accept a common authority to realize it. The identity of a society depends very much on its accepted goals and the means used to realize them.

A Nation however is not constituted by mere law, or physical force. It must be built on a minimum togetherness of its peoples. On their willingness to be a single entity that surrenders sovereign power to a ruling authority. Then the source of power is this consent of the people. This has to be so of Sri Lanka also if we are to be a nation.

If a State is forced on people who do not desire to be one nation, and if its conditions become unbearable, there occurs the phenomenon of dissent and ultimately revolt. Such a refusal to obey the power that exists does not take place unless people feel threatened in their basic human rights. Then some people - especially

youth - will feel it is not worth living under such conditions. They will rather disobey than "bow the knee before insolent might" as Tagore says. They will prefer prison to freedom in servitude and dishonour: death to a life of subordination. It is this tendency of people to offer their lives for a cause that has been the ultimate safeguard of human freedom and hence of human dignity.

When a group comes to the point of dissent and revolt it is a sign that their consent has not been given to the authority of the State. There is something which they demand that is not being recognized by that society, which they therefore regard as not having the moral power to claim their loyalty. They are alienated; they consider the rulers as alien to them. The rulers may dislike this, but these are situations which lead to fundamental social conflicts.

This is a very important aspect of the problem that we must appreciate in order to understand what is happening in our country. Most people in the North do not want to let down or "betray" the youth militants as they regard them as defenders of their rights and of their dignity. They may dislike what the youth are doing, they may be sad about it, but they see no other way out of it. This is the conclusion they draw from their experience.

Even in 1971 some of us were unhappy about the means adopted by the youthful insurgents, but they had a cause with which many sympathized. Their grievances may not yet be remedied. Similarly in the North when young persons leave their homes to fight for their liberation, parents are deeply distressed, but they accept it as unpreventable. They may even regard it as the price to be paid for the future of their people. The race or ethnic group receives a deeper loyalty than

the Sri Lankan State which they feel has been enforced on them.

This is not a question of merely an economic or Marxist analysis of society. This is a point of view that existed long before Marx and Engels. It goes back to the ancient story of human thought and life in the East and the West. It is what made Socrates ask the embarrassing question of the powers that be. It is what made Jesus Christ question societal values and the political legal system of his day. Jesus said you "whitened sepulchres", "you brood of vipers" and spoke of "Herod that Fox", it is because he thought it was not worth living as part of the social and religious establishment of that unjust society, which he likened to a white washed sepulchre full of dead men's bones inside. He preferred to give up his life rather than legitimize the reigning injustice. When Martin Luther said "Here I Stand" he took a position based on conscience against the corruption of power as he saw it. Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent resistance to British imperialism was based on the same ultimate option.

In our present crisis we should not only ask questions such as why DDCs have not worked satisfactorily in our society; we should ask why youth prefer to die than live as mere obedient vassals, why violence has erupted so often specially since 1977. Has there been a diminution of our basic humanity that we act thus towards each other?

Similar questions have to be asked concerning the majority community too. Why do they resort so often to violence? Why do they feel that there is a threat to some fundamental values they hold; why do they think they should not compromise on the demands of the minority. Why did they go about for a week killing Tamils without any sympathy? Why did they attack innocent plantation workers of Indian origin?

The Sinhala people react suddenly somewhat different from the Tamil people. Both can resort to senseless violence, but there are differences in their psychologies. A British journalist writing in 1915 described the Sinhala peoples as a very lovable people who are pleasant and suave in their ways. But they can get suddenly worked up on some cock and bull story with religious or social overtones. Then they are enraged and run mad. They get hold of any weapons like knives and sticks from their fences and give vent to their sudden fury. They then kill violently. But after 24 hours they calm down and forget their anger. (They perhaps expect others also to forget and forgive their mad fury). The Sinhala lion is said to be normally dormant, but is uncontrollable when aroused.

Probably the Tamil psychology may be more calculating, determined, long term and specific. Both can be senseless; but they cannot be classed as the lunacy of a few which can be overcome merely by physical force.

At one stage those in authority thought the terrorists were lunatics. No. These youth are the expression of a society in deep discontent. They feel that the older generation did not deliver the goods and are not capable of it. Similarly some of the goons and gundas of the majority community who took to violence came at that point to the conclusion that the Sinhala leadership, specially the Government would not or could not defend the unity of the country. (There were of course those who participated in looting due to their needs or for its advantages).

Either of these cannot be dismissed as the attitudes of mere lunatics, even though, both the violence and counter violence are senseless. They indicate a basic and unresolved problem at the heart of our society. The majority does not wish to divide the country into two

states on any condition, and the minority does not want to unite without realising some fundamental rights, for which its youth are prepared to fight and die. What are these fundamental rights which they do not wish to surrender to the State? There are some matters in which they will cooperate within one Sri Lanka if they can do so with freedom and self respect.

In our one world situation the whole country has to accept international independence in some matters. It is part of our political wisdom to discern these issues and respond to them accordingly. We must develop the attitudes of mind which can help us resolve these issues peacefully and with justice to all?

There were three major policy approaches which characterized our society, in the period 1948 to 1977. Sri Lanka society developed, survived or wobbled along from 1948 to 1977 on the basis of certain basic agreements in our country concerning:

1. Democratic processes of conflict resolution.
2. An option for a mixed economy with extensive social welfare measures.
3. A stance of non-alignment in international affairs.

In the economic and political system there was a certain opportunity for the operation of democratic processes, for the push and pull of interest groups, at by-elections and general elections - though situations gradually worsened. The major issue of ethnic relations was worsened after 1956 with the policy of Only "Sinhala" without adequate provisions for "Tamil also".

In economic life there were certain welfare measures which cushioned the poor against too great deprivation, which made education more available. These provided for greater social mobility, and ensured, by and large, a peaceful society. We had a polity in which Governments were changed by the ballot and not maintained by the bullet.

In international politics we freed the country from aligning ourselves with one or other of the super powers who wanted to divide the world among themselves.

We must consider some of these factors which made for the Sri Lankan identity of that period and which account for its progress or breakdown.

These basic characteristics of our society and polity may explain why our ethnic differences did not lead to the almost total collapse of relationships from 1958 to 1977; and why the situation has worsened sharply since 1977.

My suggestion is that these three characteristics of our way of life were very significant elements of our national identity as Ceylon and Sri Lanka. They were, ofcourse related to the more pervasive back-ground of our social and moral life based on the impact of the four major religions of our country. Even the political ideologies such as Marxist Socialism were largely contained by these options concerning political and economic life and our international relations. While they were being eroded at least from 1970, the post 1977 policies have been geared to a more radical departure from these perspectives of tolerance, mutual support and non-involvement in super power ideological conflicts. This in turn has helped undermine peace in our society - including in ethnic relations.

1. Undermining of Democracy : From the beginning of this century, specially after 1931 Sri Lanka has generally accepted the democratic approach to political life. I am therefore not talking of dictatorship, even though with dictatorship some of the problems of ethnic tensions may be contained, though not resolved. This may even be by finding places in the prisons for those who hold extreme views. Can we think of a Sri Lankan identity in which the operation of democracy is an essential feature of our polity?

Prior to 1948 our Ceylonese identity was perhaps more due to rather extraneous factors such as the sharing of the British culture and language by the elite, and subsequently to the demand for power from the British who were our common dominators, if not enemies. This was more an overarching alliance of the elites that ensured national unity as symbolized by their togetherness in the Ceylon National Congress. The riots and Martial Law of 1915 greatly helped to cement this feeling of solidarity in seeking freedom from the British.

This sense of togetherness began to be diluted as the prospect of internal self Government became more real with the Donoughmore Commission in the late 1920s. After 1931 the tensions were two fold - one for more power from the British and the other for the distribution of this power among the ethnic majority and the minorities. We have discussed earlier the course of our political evolution in relation to ethnic relations. Through all the zigzag tensions and ups and downs of political evolution the democratic belief governed by consent was maintained. We have to ask ourselves what are the limits of majority rule. How fair was it to the minorities? Have we now lost the chance of choosing our rulers by free elections, and deciding issues by consensus?

2. Democracy and majority Rule : Democracy, in so far as people give authority to the rulers also implies limits to that authority. If there are no limits to the power of rulers, there can be no operation of democracy. Groups which are outside the centre of power would be dissatisfied. In a multi-party system there is an implicit agreement on the fundamentals of society. When one party is thrown out of power it does not totally upset that implicit agreement on which the society is based.

A democratic system is operable only if there is an implicit agreement on the limits within which the voters give power to a government. The franchise cannot mean that fundamental rights like the right to life are subject to majority rule. There are fundamental rights which are not submitted to a democratic vote. These are not gifts of a government or a state. There are fundamental human values which no power on earth has the right to take away. Such human rights are not derived from a constitution; a constitution may and should recognize them. Where there is a failure to respect such fundamental rights, there is a right to dissent and even to revolt. This is accepted internationally, as by the United Nations Charter of Human Rights.

In a plural society sovereignty is never totally handed over to one authority. The different groups tend to exert pressure for their rights. But absolute sovereignty by some may be long exercised against a social class. The poor can be forgotten in the limbo of the shanties from generation to generation. But when an ethnic group has a certain homogeneity geographically and through a historical tradition, it is likely to fight back against the exercise of sovereignty by another ethnic group. The sharing of sovereignty by a devolution of authority is a solution to such a situation.

Majority rule is tolerable where a majority is shiftable and the shift is due to changeable political views. If the majority is due to some condition of birth like race then the working of democracy would demand many more safeguards against and limits to the power of the authority. Otherwise there would be the tendency for a permanent majority of a race, a class, a religion, or a sex to continually dominate and that in the name of law and order. Such a system is not workable without major crises.

One way by which such safeguards are ensured are Constituent Assemblies. In Sri Lanka there was some sort of a Constituent Assembly after the 1970 General Elections. But here too the Tamil minority was not agreeable to it. Our Constitutions are the result of a one party decision, they do not have a morally binding power on the people, specially when they relate to fundamental rights which some do not wish to surrender to the state. Power cannot be taken by governments. It has to be given by people, otherwise there is not democracy but dictatorship of some sort.

This is one of the fundamental problems in Sri Lanka, as in the rest of Asia. What is the nature and source of power and authority in this country? What is the moral base of State power, what are its means, and what are the tolerance limits of public endurance? It is within this that we can appreciate the value of devolution and decentralization which recognize the ability of people to make decisions for themselves within certain areas. Devolution provides initiative, creativity, responsibility for small areas and groups. Devolution implies the acceptance of a central authority. Devolution is not division.

In the 1978 Constitution there is an ambiguous mixture of the guaranteeing of fundamental rights and a

trend towards authoritarianism. The way the constitution was drafted and enacted typifies the spirit in which it was to be worked out. A Select Committee was appointed on the basis of the 1972 Constitution to amend it. Discussions were held on that basis. But its report was a new Constitution which was announced and rushed through the Supreme Court and Parliament in a few weeks. Thus it became law. In the process the judges of the Supreme Court were deemed to have lost their positions. Some were reappointed and others were retired prematurely.

3. Parliament Devalued : In the 1978 Constitution parliament sadly devalued. The MPs were made dependent on the political party leadership. They could not cross over to another party. They could not resign and appeal to their electorates. By-elections (other than after successful election petitions) were got rid of on the basis that there was to be a system of proportional representation. Since 5/6ths. of Parliament were members of the ruling party, its leader, who was also the head of the Government, had power that was, in effect, not subject to the control of Parliament. The President as chief Executive was not answerable to Parliament. Parliament was legally and practically incapable of deciding many policies. The MPs can be dismissed and replaced by the party leadership.

Even though the Constitution speaks of representative democracy, with the 1978 Constitution political authority was concentrated in the hands of the Executive; and through the party mechanism Parliament was subordinate to the Executive. The President being outside of Parliament and being immune before the law may ensure stable and effective government, but it is not to the advantage of democracy and representative government. The good intentions of 1978 were to have a strong government that could carry out a plan of development during its period of office. But the working out of the system

made the Executive hardly responsible to anybody. So much so that the Executive President could say I can do anything except make a male a female, or a female a male. He could talk of rolling the electoral map for 10-15 years. This is the nature of power that tends to get more and more concentrated.

That is the position to which Sri Lanka had come by early 1982 when the President announced that 1982 would be an election year. In July 1982 drastic amendments to the Constitution were proposed. They would have altered still further the representative nature of the Constitution. These were given up, but Presidential Elections were through in October 1982. This was a sudden change in the nature of the Constitution. The 1978 Constitution provided that the President could hold office for six years from 4th February 1978 with Presidential elections every six years thereafter. The Presidential Elections were to be in 1984 after Parliamentary Elections in 1983 at the latest.

The Constitution was amended to advance the Presidential Elections. The generally expressed reason was the economic situation which was expected to worsen in 1983 and 1984. The World Bank reports also indicate this. Further it was believed that the President was more popular or less unpopular than the MPs; therefore it was better to have his position consolidated first. The chief opposition candidate was excluded from contesting the Presidential elections because her civic rights had been removed in 1980. That too was essentially an initiative of the Executive ratified by a suppliant Parliament (cf. CSR Dossier No. 87 on Civic Rights)

What is significant for our present purpose is that this line of action upset the balance and trust that existed in the operation of the political system. Prior to 1983 there was hope of peaceful change through demo-

cratic processes in spite of all the deficiencies of the earlier situation. Now such changes were being prevented, through the use of the 5/6ths. majority in Parliament. These changes were unfair and eroded the confidence in the government's democratic intent, even though each stage was enacted legally according to the government's own constitution.

4. The Politics of Thuggery : After 1977 the spiral of violence continued to be aggravated and accelerated in the North. In the South too there were several occasions when issues were settled by mob thuggery rather than by the rule of law. Small and specific acts of indiscipline and mob violence were condoned. This led to a change in mood among the law forcing agencies. Both these trends diluted the respect for law and order and attenuated the hope of settlement of ethnic issues by political compromise. They strengthened the belief in the North that there will be no realization of the rights of the Tamils without the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

In the South, some of those who advocated the cause of Sinhala nationalism felt that the Government was giving in too much to the Tamil people. They felt the Government was too legal and too weak in its dealings with terrorist activity in the North. They felt the army and police were unable to give an all out blow to terrorism because of such democratic niceties like the rule of law which in any case the Northern youth militants did not respect. Thus there was a build-up of tensions and of extra legal approaches both in the North and in the South.

In the South too a series of events contributed to the breaking down of the respect for legitimate authority and for the rule of law. A general strike of workers

in July 1980 demanding a salary increase, commensurate with the rise in the cost of living, was crushed by Government dismissing the strikers. Estimates of dismissed workers range from 40,000 mentioned by the Government to 100,000 according to workers organizations. At this time a mob attacked the strikers and killed Somapala a trade unionist. The Government was not responsive to the agonising pleas of the dismissed workers and their families. At least 13 of them committed suicide due to their frustration with a situation that seemed to leave no hope of relief. The Government thus brought the organized working class under a measure of control, but it also left a deep bitterness among tens of thousands who were unemployed for a long period. Even now over 10,000 of them have still not regained their jobs. This meant that a considerable body of workers and their families were led to deep frustration. They had almost a vested interest in the change of the Government.

During the past few years thugs have been used against different groups that sought redress of grievances through public protest or peaceful demonstrators. The police often turned a blind eye to the activities of such thuggery. It was even alleged that powerful groups supporting the Government were offering protection to these mobs. In this way students, women workers on strike, nurses, 700 blind weavers, Buddhist monks, joint clergy gatherings, the Sinhala Balavegaya, Prof. Ediriweera Sarathchandra and others were given similar violent treatment by thugs with police connivance (and sometimes participation) and powerful political protection if not encouragement. This seemed to be the dominant mode of settling most political issues. People began to lose confidence in redress of grievances through peaceful means. Some Civil and Human rights campaigners were labelled "Communists" by the President himself - in an effort to discredit them.

When recourse was made to the courts of Law the police officers found guilty by the Supreme Court of violating human rights were hastily promoted by the State. Finally the Supreme Court judges themselves had threats and insults hurled at them by unruly mobs that were allegedly transported in state-owned vehicles. Thus step by step the mob seemed to lay down the law even in the streets of Colombo, without any fear of the Government or of the police. It is alleged that leading political personalities have groups similar to private armies that could be used to get rid of embarrassing peaceful protestors. These mafia had a taste of mob power through such activities. While the State was extremely harsh against Northern terrorists, its attitude towards these thugs in the South seemed rather benevolent. This too led to loss of confidence in its impartiality and non-violence.

Recourse to arbitration by thuggery is a very dangerous principle. It can bring short term returns to the powerful of the day. It gets rid of the inconvenience of the rule of law, of having to justify one's actions before the judiciary. It prevents any effective expression of dissent, or even of discussion of public issues. It sends the more liberal minded community leaders and intellectuals away from the political and societal dialogue. The underworld of thugs take over the control of the political process, with the connivance of the forces of law and order and the blessings of their powerful political mentors. The price of dissent became not merely dismissal as for the members of parliament and the public service, but the violence of thugs and ridicule by a captive or co-opted press. There was no legal redress against such arbitration by thuggery though the political leadership preached eloquently on the rule of law, democracy, socialism and a Dharmishta Samajaya.

One of the dangers of arbitration by thuggery is that it can boomerang on the Government itself. The pri-

vate armies can clash among themselves or against the law and order itself.

Thus by July 1983 a situation had been reached when law and order was under severe strain in the North due to youth militancy, which was a form of calculated sporadic violence, and the indiscriminate retaliation by the armed forces. In the South private mobs were increasingly calling the tune in public life. Even the judiciary were being threatened by thugs.

Unfortunately the supreme political authority that had armed itself with unprecedented legal power and the letters of resignation of Government Members of Parliament seem to smile benignly at such developments, or even to hope to benefit from them. The art of government seemed to have been understood as the strategy of balancing thug power so that the rulers are confirmed in their position. The much vaunted rule of law and reign of justice were sacrificed at the altar of power. This meant a fundamental subversion of the democratic principles on which our State and society were based. Might not right was often the arbiter of issues. There was no remedy against thuggery. Thug armies tasted power and enjoyed its benefits.

The path was thus opened to the dominance of thug power over justice and human rights. The violence of July 1983 was the acme of the exercise of such power. For several days local thugs exercised almost uncontrolled power in several places.

5. The Referendum and the Loss of Confidence in Democratic Processes : The Referendum of December 1982, removed hope of change in the political balance of power through general elections till 1989. It deprived the political parties

of the chance of seeking entry to Parliament through the people's vote. Those who were not in Parliament were deprived of an opportunity of entering Parliament for another six years. This led to such parties losing confidence in the Parliamentary process which was thus being rendered inoperative. The manner in which the Referendum was conducted made an even greater dent into the tradition of free and fair elections. The Government's Referendum Campaign involved a blatant disregard for the law. This was evident in the case of the illegal public display of the pro Government lamp symbol. Almost every where in the country the police openly permitted the flouting of the referendum law. Even more serious was the resort to mob violence to prevent meetings opposing the postponement of general elections. The day of the Referendum was like a day of battle. In many places electoral malpractices were rampant. Many presiding officers were intimidated by thugs. To add to this the Referendum Law did not provide for judicial redress against the illegalities of the Referendum campaign.

Thus in the South too nearly half the population were deprived of having elected representatives in Parliament. Even the Government supporters could vote only for the full slate of sitting members with one 'yes' for the lamp symbol. They could not choose their particular MPs. The MPs themselves had no chance of being voted to Parliament personally. It was in vain that we pleaded with those who called for the Referendum not to thus send discontent underground. It could be expected that deep frustration would be experienced by the JVP, many of whose leaders had earlier spent six years in prison. This was followed by six years of their endeavouring to enter the political field through parliamentary elections. But by-elections were first got rid of and thereafter general elections were postponed till 1989. The youth aged 18 years in 1977 may thereby have no chance to vote at a general election till they are 30 years in 1989.

The control of the media of communications by the Government and its supporters meant that the Government could not be adequately aware of the peoples problems or of their discontent. Government and the mainstream media readers and audiences were made to believe the official stories of successful development on an unprecedented scale.

Under the last Government (1970-1977) too there were similar trends. Then even the present President Mr. J.R.Jayawardena was subjected to an attack by a mob when he led a protest march. At Attanagalla the mob stopped his march while police looked the other way. This was called the Attanagalla doctrine or process. Mr. Thondaman, Minister of Rural Industries asked whether the July '83 incidents were of the same nature. The Criminal Justice Commission was used in the period prior to 1977 to harass people considered inconvenient to the powers that be.

Under the last Government there were, however, a few more safety valves for the people. The Opposition in Parliament was more numerous and strong. By-elections were held - even though some were delayed. The press was less one sided than at present though the Independent Newspapers house was sealed. The business interests and Government were not all on the same side. The religious leaders too were more explicitly critical of certain policies. The General Elections were postponed from five to seven years, but there was confidence that they would be held. After September 1975, the government Coalition was broken up and the LSSP too was in the opposition. The fairness of electoral practices were still not seriously doubted by the general public. The overwhelming victory of the opposition at the General Elections of 1977 showed that the Government did not interfere much with the elections. The trade unions and student movements were not so strongly controlled. In any case there

was not so much systematic resort to thug power to break up all opposition.

By the end of 1976 the Government could not contain or suppress the people's discontent. As it was unprepared to face Parliament, Parliament was prorogued in early 1977 prior to its being dissolved.

In the present time Parliament itself is not a credible form for the expression of the people's views on many issues at least for 40-50% of the electorate. The Government members of Parliament are themselves persons who have more or less accepted a rule of self-abnegation. Their undated letters of resignation are with the leader of their political party who is also the head of the Government. As one of them commented dismissal is the price of dissent. MPs do not have the right of appeal to the people. If they are dismissed they may end up in the political wilderness. Crossing over is possible, de facto, only to the Government side, thanks to a well calculated constitutional amendment.

The giving up of general elections also means that the people are deprived of an opportunity to bring their MPs before the electorate. Elections give the people an opportunity of voting out MPs whom they do not like. The Politicians have to come to the voters seeking their support.

This blunting of the political processes of democratic life has unfortunate effects on the rulers themselves. They get isolated from the mass of the people. The people on the other hand come to believe that the only remedy to their major discontent has to be by extra parliamentary and extra legal methods.

A deeper malaise is that issues and events such as the manner in which the Constitution has being amended

to suit the Party in power, the sudden imposition of the Presidential elections, the take over of power till 1989 by the Referendum all largely reduced the confidence of the public in the sense of fairplay and even public honesty of the rulers. Most people could see through the callousness with which any reason or excuse was used to retain power including the two third majority in Parliament. The use of the government controlled mass media to propagate half truths or untruths has made people cynical about them. Stories such as that of the "Naxalite threat" of October - December 1982 are more hardly believed even by the pro-Government supporters. Yet it was used to detain and immobilize active and important opposition leaders.

The use of the anti-Eelam cry by the Government at each of these polls in October 1982, December 1982 and May 1983 meant that a pressure was exerted on the public concerning the threat of the division of the country. It was often stated that the President, this Parliament and Government party MPs must be returned at those polls because otherwise the country would be divided by the Tamil 'Tigers' of Eelam. This was not conducive to racial harmony. On the contrary it helped to antagonize the Sinhala people.

By early 1983 the process of change of Government by democratic methods had been almost totally eroded. Even outside of ethnic relations there was a political situation in which power had been concentrated in the hand of one person and his close collaborators. They were in effect, not responsible to the people. Whatever their good intentions in bringing about the situation, there were inherent disadvantages and dangers in such a monopoly of power. The stage was thus set for the accumulated frustration of the people to seek release in extra legal or violent forms. The manner or timing of such actions could not be foreseen. But the political environment was

thus set for some major outburst of violence due to mass fears and discontent.

The Referendum had a direct relation to timing of the July 1983 explosion. The Parliament of 1977 was to complete its first six years on 22.07.1983. The MPs of the TULF had expressed the desire to resign their seats after that date, as the North had voted against the prolonging of the term of the 1977 Parliament by a Referendum. This raised a serious question for the Government. If the TULF MPs resigned the Parliament would not have any democratic representatives from the Sri Lanka Tamils, with the support of the majority of that community. The atmosphere in the North was such that any by-election would not have been favourable to the Government.

To forestall such a resignation the President hurriedly summoned an all Party Conference for the 20th July. The wiping out of terrorism was to be the only agenda for this conference. Only the pro-U.N.P., C.W.C. responded favourably to this invitation. At the request of the C.W.C. the President then broadened the scope of the conference and invited the parties to a second session on 27th July. The TULF was to decide during the weekend of 23rd - 24th July whether to attend this second conference. It was at this stage that the killing of the 13 soldiers in the North on the night of July 23rd and the attack on the Tamils in the South July 24 - 31st took place. In this sense the Referendum and its consequences were part of the explanation why this explosion occurred at this particular time.

Thus the overall political evolution, specially after July 1977, is an important cause of the ethnic catastrophe of July 1983. Hence any solution to the present national crisis must include a satisfactory resolution of the political crisis of the people's rights and of

the continuing responsibility of government to the governed as a whole.

C. ECONOMIC POLICIES AGGRAVATE ETHNIC TENSIONS

The United National Party led by Mr. J. R. Jayawardene offered itself to the people at the General Elections of 1977 as a party that had learnt the lessons from its past as well as from the problems that caused the unpopularity of the 1970-77 Government of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The UNP projected the image of a party that was concerned with people, with freedom and justice, with sharing and participation of the people in Government at all levels. It promised to set up a truly democratic and socialist Sri Lanka. It came forward as the saviour that would remove the heavy burdens that lay on the people specially the poor. Many supported the U.N.P. in the expectation of a new era in which there would be the combination of the advantages of free enterprise with foreign aid and social justice to all. As mentioned earlier the problems of the Tamil people were also to be resolved through this process. That was in July 1977.

By the time of its first Budget towards the end of the year the main outlines of the economic policies of the new Government were announced and began to be implemented. The economy was to be rapidly liberalized. Import controls, exchange controls and travel restrictions were almost wholly given up. The market forces were to determine prices, and the flow of goods and services. Foreign investment was welcomed and given exceptional guarantees. The rupee was devalued from Rs.8.5 to a US Dollar to Rs.15.5.

Planning for the whole economy was regarded as undesirable and unnecessary; instead certain lead programmes were decided on. These were to be the principal catalysts of the economy. The establishment of a Free

Trade Zone, the development of tourism, the development of the Greater Colombo area, housing and later the accelerated Mahaveli development were to be the lead projects.

In 1978 and 1979 there was much buoyancy in the economy. The country seemed to be set on a new path in which it could take off to rapid economic development like Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. Singapore was spoken of as the model for Sri Lanka of the future. The Western capitalist countries and Japan offered us much aid in the form of grants, loans and investments. We were more and more plugged into the international market of trade and investments. Goods were in plenty in the shops, travel was easy; money was plentiful in circulation. The Government was optimistic. The Finance Minister was jubilant. His contention was that money was available, we lacked only the projects for utilizing this money. The country went on a spending spree - with borrowed money.

This honeymoon was shortlived in relation to the life of a country. Within three years we were experiencing grave economic tensions. The new policy package which had many good points to its credit had many snags that were eventually to prove grave obstacles to the country's economic progress.

On the side of production, the new policies of import liberalization were not so favourable for our agricultural or industrial production. While paddy was encouraged by price increases, many other crops suffered due to liberal imports. Minor agricultural crops suffered due to the competition of imports. Producers of chillies, onions, sugar, jaggery etc. were unsure of market prices. This discouraged production. The rise in oil prices sent up the fertilizer bill.

Local industrial production too was not encouraged by the new policies; or at least the smaller less efficient producers faced severe foreign competition. Many had to close down their factories. Thus while the Free Trade Zone provided employment to about 30,000 mainly in the garment industry, the handloom industry virtually came to an end. Perhaps, close on a hundred thousand were affected by this. Many other small industrialists were similarly affected. Public sector industries which fared badly were closed down or handed over to private companies including foreigners.

The sectors which grew rapidly were trade, transport, and construction. These implied a heavy import bill. Trade was left to the determinations of the market. The pent up demand which was thus released led to a flooding of the markets with imported goods - largely consumer goods. On the other hand export income did not increase correspondingly. This meant that the country had to face a continually increasing balance of trade and balance of payments deficit, despite the growth of tourism.

The Government policy of financing its massive development projects through aid and the printing of rupees fed the inflationary trends in the economy. This meant that the local costs of production and the cost of living rose steadily. The market forces of supply and demand of goods and of money did not operate in such a way as to maintain a fair balance, because imports were not controlled and foreign aid including loans were readily available for us to import their goods. Thus consumer goods of all types kept coming into the market, even though our balance of payments worsened, our debts increased and some of our industries declined.

Projects such as the accelerated Mahaweli, Housing, tourism required a heavy import of equipment, raw materials and even consumer goods. The Mahaweli projects did

not produce in the short term consumer goods for our market. The products of the F.T.Z. were for export. Houses were for use, they are not so marketable. Therefore these investments did not supply goods that would keep down prices and the cost of living. The main projects were of long term duration.

The different ministries pushed their development projects according to each one's priorities. The Ministers with greater political pull somehow obtained the funds from the national budget, even when monies could hardly be provided by the country. The President's ministries included such economic liabilities like Air Lanka, concerning whose deficits the World Bank recently seriously warned the government. Sri Jayawardenapura with the new Parliament and the administrative blocks needed about Rs.3 billion. The Prime Minister plugged his housing programme of a 100,000 houses. The Mahaweli development required a major investment programme - fortunately much of this came as grants from donor countries.

The economic policies after 1977 generated much economic activity, gave employment to new groups, provided incentives for labour migration to the Middle East, and in general revamped a rather stagnant economy. One of its drawbacks was that it had no serious planning of the economy. It allowed influential ministers to pull in different directions. The proliferation of ministers over 80 of them - was also an inducement to increased public expenditure, not to mention wastage. The many development projects too left room for much waste and corruption. It is said that acceleration of the economy led to an acceleration of corruption itself to an unprecedented degree.

The new economic policies failed to control the vicious circle of more imports leading to greater trade deficits, more debts, more debt servicing and financial difficulties for the Government. These led to more aid

being required and more dependence on donors. They in turn exact a higher return for loans or for more favoured treatment for their companies. These trends necessitated a further and further devaluation of the Rupee. The exchange rate for the U.S. dollar was Rs.18 by end 1980, Rs.20 by end 1981 and now it is Rs.25. This increases prices of imported goods including oil and fertilizers, and therefore also of local products. Thus we face the sad situation of continuing inflation.

This unsatisfactory situation has now been continuing for over three years with the problems of budgeting worsening each year.

The post-1977 economic policies failed to satisfy several divergent groups in Sri Lanka society. The first to react strongly against the strain were the urban workers specially in the public sector. They tried to obtain higher wages through a general strike in July 1980. They were mercilessly dismissed by the Government through the use of legal powers and with the help of politically motivated thugs. This was to be a lesson to all who wanted to try to change the free economy that was being imposed on the country.

The Tamil minority in the North also faced many disadvantages due to this economic process. Some groups such as traders and transport agents prospered under the new dispensation. Quite a few went to the Middle East and sent back a considerable amount of funds to their families in Sri Lanka. But the farmers in the North found the market for their products uncertain. Many had earned a living on onions, chillies and potatoes. Now liberal imports in favour of consumers made it difficult for producers to be sure of a profit, specially as the costs of inputs such as fertilizers, power and labour were increasing steadily.

The Tamil people felt that the major development projects of the Government did not benefit their area, specially the Peninsula. It is claimed that land, land development and irrigation in the North are not given adequate importance by the State. The Mahaweli Development programme - our biggest ever, and the Government's main achievement and showpiece - is not expected to benefit the Tamils at least in the short term. The Tamil leaders feel they have hardly any say concerning the planning of settlements in the new areas to be opened up under these schemes. The accent on fisheries development is also relatively less in the North, though they claim to produce about half the island's catch.

In the industrial sector the sentiment in the North is that the open economy has not helped industrial growth there. A few very affluent Tamil businessmen benefitted from the new opportunities - but they too invested mainly in the South and in foreign trade or production for export. In the North many handlooms had to be closed down. The State did not start any major industry except for the development of the Cement Factory. The feeling there is that the Central Governments have not been interested in industrial development in the North and East. The Cement Factory, the Paper Mills and Paranthan Chemicals were all developed over 30 years ago when Mr. G.G. Ponnambalam was the Minister of Industries. The private sector too is said to face many disincentives when it wishes to invest in the North. This is seen as part of the Government policy.

Although the new Government voted about Rs.3 billion each year for housing, the North has received little attention in State housing. It is said that there were only three model villages in 1983 in the Northern Province out of 168 model villages. Many of the major housing complexes were in the South, specially in the suburbs of Colombo as the new industries were being set up in these areas.

The Free Trade Zone being in Katunayaka as phase one of the Greater Colombo Economic Commission's programme naturally gave employment to workers from the South. Tamil capital may have invested in the F.T.Z. but the employment was to be mainly for Sinhala young women. The system by which employment in the public sector was to be given on the recommendation of (Government) members of Parliament was also not to the advantage of the Tamil youth. There are serious allegations of bribery in appointments to the public service. The levels of the bribe required have escalated with the inflation.

Tourism, another lead project of the Government did not lead to much investment in Jaffna. The North was neglected in Tourist planning and advertising; perhaps this was more due to its arid climate or lack of tourist interests.

Health services have been rather neglected all over the country. The people of Jaffna feel that their services are particularly neglected.

Higher education is an area in which the youth and families of the North feel frustrated either due to disadvantages or lack of opportunities. The problems here are not due to lack of public direction, but rather because the standardization of marks for admission to the universities begun under the last Government was discriminatory against the Tamils. The admission policy now is much more equitable in relation to ethnic groups, though not to the socially marginalized. The Private Medical College however is an institution to which only the children of the privileged can enter as the fees charged are above Rs.100,000 for the entire medical course. This can generate ethnic imbalances in the future supply of doctors.

The liberalized economic policies of the U.N.P. Government satisfied some Sinhala business people who

were adequately well developed to be able to resist foreign competition. It is contended that under the previous Government State regulation and political patronage were favourable to the small Sinhala entrepreneurs. They had access to the permits and licences and the advantages of a protected market. After 1977 they fared badly due to foreign competition and many had to close down. It is possible that both they and even the more successful Sinhala and Muslim business people looked askance at the more successful big Tamil entrepreneurs. Those at the top of the business world whatever be their ethnic background had adequate access to decision makers. Several big firms with Tamil capital were among the principal beneficiaries of the liberalized import policies of Government and of lucrative contracts in the major development projects.

The fact that many Tamil factories and shops were attacked in a planned manner in July 1983 shows that there was considerable feeling about their position in the urban economies of Colombo and elsewhere in the South. This may have been due to business competition, trade rivalries or even a sense of unfair advantage for some. It may have been a class reaction of the underprivileged that took an ethnic turn due to the circumstances of the time. In any case the lack of concern by the State for social justice in development is part of the cause of this situation which contributed to the economic causes of the July 1983 violence.

The Sinhala villages were another area in which there has been discontent concerning the economic development of the last few years. They too were affected by the cuts in welfare and the rise in the cost of living. Employment has been generated in and around the towns and in the areas of the Mahaweli development programmes. Many workers migrated to the Middle East. The tea and rubber plantations were however not a priority for investment by the State. The State owns most of the tea and much of

the rubber estates. The surplus from these and the income from export duties were absorbed into the general revenue. In the budgets it was the lead projects of the Government that were well provided for. Due to the increase in costs of labour, fertilizers, oil and other imported inputs the costs of running the estates increased. There was thus a tendency to neglect the estates. Replanting and even fertilizing were neglected. Increased pilfering and the successive droughts made matters worse.

A consequence of this approach was that the opportunities for employment in the villages close to the estates did not increase significantly. The plantations could have been a source of more employment due to greater use of rubber as a raw material, or diversification in the use of tea lands. The estates did not help reduce the pressure for jobs in the villages with the increase in population and more women seeking employment. The Sinhala village people were on the other hand more prepared to take jobs on the estates specially in the factories, because the estates were now State owned and labour did not have to be residential. The slowing down after 1977 of the rate of "repatriation" of plantation workers of recent Indian origin may have also meant fewer openings for Sinhala labour on the estates. With unemployment in the villages the estates seemed to offer at least some employment even if irregular. It is probable that the desire of Sinhala workers to have jobs on the estates may have been a cause of the attacks on the Tamil workers on the estates. This has been characteristic of the 1977, 1981 and 1983 communal violence. They were not attacked in 1956 and 1958.

In any case a consequence of this violence has been that several tens of thousands of Tamils of recent Indian origin have fled from or left these plantation areas. They have gone to more hospitable surroundings in the North and East or to India. At present they feel quite insecure in the estate areas where they are in smaller numbers and

surrounded by Sinhala villagers. The very migration to the North as Vavuniya and Kilinochchi has created further problems of ethnic relations as other Sinhala people may resent their presence or be wary of the agencies set up to receive and support them.

It is surprising that plantation workers were thus attacked though they were not for the Indian division of Sri Lanka or for violence and their CWC supported the Government. The economic relationship between the villages and the estates, and the long-term sense of grievance of the Sinhala villages may be part of the explanation of this tragic and inhuman violence against people who are themselves victims of the exploitative economic system. It is claimed that 180,000 plantation workers have been uprooted due to communal violence in 1983.* They have fled mainly to the North and the East of Sri Lanka. This is an immense human tragedy unparalleled in recent centuries.

A point that is relevant in this regard is that a mere free economy with liberalized imports and foreign aid does not necessarily mean a fair distribution of incomes and jobs or even the creation of adequate employment where it is required. There must be a more rational and equitable planning of the path and processes of economic development in the country. Otherwise the short-term and long-term economic imbalances, given our ethnic background, tend to lead to undesirable rivalry and even savage cruelty as we have witnessed recently.

As mentioned earlier the urban poor, specially in the shanties, were another area of seething discontent consequent on injustice. They too suffered from the removal of the welfare subsidies. They continued to be neglected though the open economy provided some side lines for employment as in trade, transport, tourism and migration. The ostentatious way of life of the elite and the abundant supply of imported goods in the shops, which

* N. Shanmugathasan "The National Question in Sri Lanka" (Mimeographed)

the poor could hardly buy, added to the sense of deprivation among the urban shanty people. These different factors tended to make the situation of the poorer people more difficult and for their discontent to increase. They sought to give expression to it in terms of democratic protests in the form of trade union activities, strikes, newspaper and academic criticism, public protests, appeals to the courts for the defence of fundamental rights etc.

The Government tended to prevent the expression of such opinion going beyond what it considered tolerable. Almost imperceptibly the rulers seem to have come to the view that what is good for capital, specially foreign capital, is good for the country. This led to repression of workers, making strikes illegal dismissing workers on strike, control or buying up of newspapers and of television, restrictions on university freedoms, prevention of public protests, getting rid of by-elections, invoking mob-violence as an arm of the powerful to prevent expression of dissent, control or inhibition of the judiciary and even getting rid of general elections.

Already before 1977 authoritarianism was growing. The social contradictions were increasing. After 1977 the Government has had such a vested interest in capitalism and the priority of private enterprises that it has not been willing to face the risk of free elections. Therefore we can understand why the Referendum was decided on and was carried out in such determined and undemocratic manner to ensure the postponement of general elections till 1989.

These measures are legitimized and rationalized in terms of public security, stability, development. We may of course ask questions such as security for whom, stability for whom and "development" for whom? We can learn many valuable lessons from this experience specially concerning the limits of such a form of capitalism, and of the dangers of the suppression of the expression of public opinion.

1. Capitalism and Equity in a Plural Society

The capitalist economic system operates on the motor of money and profits. It has no inner principle for working towards equity, Social and moral considerations do not count for much in the decision making in the market system which operates on supply and demand. The market is supposed to bring about a desirable equilibrium in the economic system. President Reagan has spoken of the "magic of the market". But are not the market forces insensitive to moral values?

In a plural society where there are many religions, social classes, castes or ethnic groups, there is a likelihood that such a system may not necessarily work equitably in relation to these. The poor may become poorer without the economic system showing any sympathy for them. Inequalities may grow even when the general standard of living rises. It is still worse if the inequalities grow while the overall economy deteriorates and corruption, conspicuous waste, dependence and inflation increase.

Where there is an original ethnic imbalance in the economy a free enterprise system tends to increase ethnic tensions. It makes the poorer ethnic group worse, thus the inequalities or monopolies in trade, housing, may grow unless checked.

A simple example is the Mattakkuliya, Crow Island housing scheme. The houses planned to be built in these were to be given to the fishermen around the area for a rent of Rs.35/=. That was the intention when Mr. Sugathadasa initiated this project in the late 1960s. The new Government filled the land after 1977 with the help of a foreign company using sophisticated equipment. The costs rose and the small housing units of 30' by 12' feet with an upstair were so expensive that they were offered to buyers for Rs.200,000/=, at least Rs.50,000/=

had to be paid immediately and the balance as a loan to be repaid monthly with the interest due on it. Those who could pay this were given preference.

The net result of the first phase was that out of 192 houses 30 odd houses were taken by the Petroleum Corporation and the army for their minor employees, 120 out of the balance were taken by Tamil families. This happened without any plan to do so. The Tamil families wanted houses in the city, in a Government scheme in Colomobo 15 which they considered a secure place. But to others this seemed not only unfair to the local poor people but also a sort of favouritism on ethnic lines. Further these new residents hardly fraternized socially with their poorer neighbours.

When the disturbances broke out, between 2 p.m. of the 25th July and 2 a.m. of the following morning about 35 Tamil houses were fully looted. No damage was done to the houses as they were Government property. In this instance the free market principle resulted in an inequity which seems discriminatory in favour of the Tamils. Similar results may occur in favour of one social class or religious group.

The realization of equity must be worked out on some principle of justice if we want harmony in this plural society. A free enterprise system alone, specially if it does not permit the push and pull of the democratic process is likely to lead to inequity in favour of one group or the other. Some of the developments after 1977 thus acclerated the causes for the tensions in society. This may have also increased ethnic tensions.

In this sense the more an economic system is capitalist it leaves decisions in economic affairs more and more to the weightage of money. There is a likelihood of this leading to ethnic tensions, specially when a majority com-

munity feels discriminated, or where a powerful elite minority feel they have no chance within the system.

If discontent leads to protests which threaten the system, and if the free economic system is to be maintained at all costs the rulers will tend to be authoritarian. This leads to prevention of the operation of the free democratic institutions and the violence of the oppressed as the only way out for them.

Such discontent of a social class may be repressed by the elite using the powers of the State. A revolution may overthrow such a state; but this is not easy. Generally the power elite can afford to forget the poor masses, it has the support of the law, and of the armed forces.

When however discontent is among an ethnic group that lives in a more or less homogenous territory, the discrimination may be seen as communal or ethnic by one group or the other. Then economic issues can become central to the relations among the ethnic groups. It is more difficult to suppress a discontented ethnic group, specially if some of its members are socially equal to the elite of the dominant ethnic group.

This argument is not dependent on whether the economy is improving or worsening. If there is all round economic growth and all sectors of society benefit then, such free enterprise may be tolerable and even desirable.. All may improve even if inequalities grow. But if the situation worsens and the powers that be are not prepared to permit the economic policies to be changed by the political balance of power as after general elections, representative democracy through the peoples franchise is not workable.

This is the position that was arrived at in Sri Lanka by 1982, because the Government did not want to risk

a general election of members of Parliament. It wanted to keep its 2/3 majority by any means in order to be able to amend the Constitution according to its requirements. One of the main reasons for this desire for stability was to ensure the continuation of the policies of the free economy, and specially to guarantee foreign investments.

Thus despite its good intentions of 1977 and 1978 the logic of its economic options, made the Government want to suppress free elections. The Referendum was no substitute for a general election. The movement away from the mixed economy thus compromised political democracy. It also made the solution of the ethnic problem more difficult. These are some political consequences of its economic policies which made the free economy an indispensable component of its new orthodoxy.

When dissent is thus not permitted beyond the limits of tolerance, it becomes difficult to decentralize or devolve the powers of Government to ethnic groups or territorial units of a country.

It is therefore fairly clear that there is a relationship between the economic options of the Government since 1977 and the concentration of power. How far this has a relation to the reluctance to devolve power to the districts is an issue to be studied further. Likewise how far the free economy and its success or failure contributed to the outburst of violence in July 1983 has to be scrutinised more clearly.

As the social, economic and political systems of a country are linked together, these factors are inter-related in their causality and almost certainly in their consequences.

It may be asked whether a more mixed economy and better planned may not have permitted more expression of dissent

and correspondingly the operation of democracy, including by-elections, and general elections, and also greater devolution of power to the districts.

There can thus be a fundamental contradiction between the attempt to impose a free economy and the need for a devolution of power to the periphery. The need for social discipline may have led to more authoritarian Government; but at what point the need for such desirable discipline ceases, and the use of power by those in authority becomes undesirable is a difficult question to discern, specially when it is the authority itself that has to decide on the limits of its power.

It is a pity that Sri Lankan policy makers forgot or neglected the lesson of history that the market forces of free enterprise alone will not bring about social justice in the economic sphere specially in multi-ethnic society. Such free enterprise neglects the human person and the family specially the poor. Even the minimal cushioning provided by social services such as subsidies tends to be taken away. A more rational and just policy requires good planning, more responsiveness to people's needs and demands. Repression is no answer to human need and genuine grievances.

2. Democracy and Economic Policies in Poor Countries

These experiences in Sri Lanka make us ask the question whether the operation of democracy in poor oppressed countries like ours is linked to their economic system. This is a theoretical issue concerning which only a hypothesis can be offered - without perhaps sufficient historical experience for its verification.

Sri Lanka is one of the few countries in the so called Third World with a sort of working democracy where governments were and can be changed by the ballot. How

was this possible in a sea of authoritarian regimes with India as a most notable exception? One reason seems to be Sri Lanka's option for a policy of a mixed economy which eschewed both extremes of orthodox capitalism and out and out socialism. Between 1965 and 1977 we had a mixture of private and public enterprise with a considerable measure of social services as a support to the poor people.

Democracy depends on an explicit or implicit compromise on the basic principles of a society. This includes an agreement on the nature of the economy viz. concerning the principles, policies and programmes in relation to the ownership, management, and distribution of benefits of an economy. A democracy depends for its survival on a consensus within a basic area of tolerated changes. A democratic society implicitly permits certain changes to be determined by the shift of the marginal votes, for often it is these that decide general elections.

If a policy that is more extreme is opted for it is unlikely to be operable under a democratic system specially in a poor country within a receding world economy.

Socialism of a more or less complete nature and uncontrolled capitalism or unbridled free enterprise are two extreme approaches. These hardly permit changes in the economic system with every general election i.e. a society cannot have five years of total socialism and five years of a totally free economy. Historical experience is that socialist regimes rely on a more or less authoritarian form of government. No socialist system has yet permitted a fundamental change of its economic system by general elections. Nor have capitalist countries permitted a socialist society of an extreme type to be set up through the ballot.

Almost all the capitalistic societies in the poor countries have authoritarian regimes that do not tolerate changes of Government by free elections.

It would seem that a democratic system is workable in a poor country only if there is a mixed economy which permits a change towards one direction or the other within certain tolerance limits. Such a system would have to provide at least some social welfare measures that soften the working of the free enterprise system and cushion the poor against its rigours. Even in rich capitalist countries the franchise led to a transformation and broadening of the social welfare measures, even alongside a concentration of capital. Further these countries often have the advantage of the benefits of foreign investments from which even the working classes benefitted.

If, as Lenin says, imperialism prevented the collapse of capitalism in Western Europe, it may be more true to say that imperialism and the spoils of economic exploitation abroad helped in the survival of political democracy in the rich Western countries.

In a mixed economy if a government adopts a more socialistic approach the free enterprise sectors bring pressures to prevent the economy becoming so static that freedom is no longer effective.

A mixed economy seems therefore essential for the success of democratic political institutions, in poor countries. On the other hand if a government is determined on an almost wholly free enterprise economy to the extent that capital is the principal determinant of economic policy and if the thrust of policy is thoroughly in the direction of handing over the economy to private enterprise, there can be serious difficulties for the satisfactory working of democracy in such a country.

Poor countries do not have foreign investments to buttress their economies against democratic pressures for more sharing of the national income.

In Sri Lanka there is a large public sector still, thanks to the earlier nationalization policies, specially of the large estates. But the overall economic policy is capitalistic in orientation even if the base of ownership is largely public. The public sector can then be made to serve the interests of the dominant sector of private capital. It is incorrect to argue that Sri Lanka has a mixed economy merely because 50-60% of capital is state owned. For more than the public ownership it is the direction of public policy that is important for determining the nature and trend of an economy.

In the "Third World" that is open to foreign economic exploitation, democratic institutions become more unworkable if dependence on foreign aid grows. Where the aid is for investment on projects of a long gestation period - such as the Mahaweli development - the difficulties for the national economy may be greater in the short term till the projects begin to bear fruit for the people of the country.

This social phenomenon is an indication of the economic system causing much hardships, and of the law and order system itself breaking down. The ethnic conflict contributed to both these factors, while they themselves make the resolution of the ethnic crisis more difficult. The situation is reaching a point where the breakdown in social life may be so widespread that civilian rule itself may be replaced by the military, or some form of direct dictatorship. Already in most of the North and parts of the East the central government has lost control of the situation. After dark it is the young militants who exercise effective power - except when and where the security forces decide to engage them in combat. The future of de-

mocratic and free institutions in the whole country is now as grave and urgent an issue as the unity of the country and justice to all ethnic groups. We are coming fast to the limits of tolerance within which free institutions and the rule of law, including the defence of fundamental rights through the judiciary, are respected.

It is a further pity that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, our mentors on economic policy, have not learnt their lessons even from the previous examples of Pakistan under Ayub Khan, Vietnam under U.S. domination and Iran under the Shah - to mention only some Asian examples of the bursting asunder of some Western backed economic showpieces.

A valid conclusion from this experience seems to be that economic development to be just and equitable, specially in a plural society must have a considerable extent of national planning with objectives of not only growth but also fair distribution. It is not enough to have mere growth, the areas of growth and the nature of the things produced are also important. The patterns of ownership are not neutral to social justice.

If we have a large measure of free-enterprise and an open arm invitation to foreign companies to invest here, there should be adequate restraints against the tendency of companies to make their profit their primary goal. Companies specially big transnationals cannot be expected to impose the necessary self control on their acquisitiveness. Nor will the operation of the free market forces necessarily bring about equity. On the contrary injustice is likely to grow. Further it becomes difficult to check corruption, smuggling, pollution of the environment, and the buying up of the local elite, of mass media and of intellectual and cultural leaders. Big companies have a way of generating a public opinion that is self legitimizing. When a Government is allied to them,

the dangers of self justification through one's own propaganda leading even to self delusion are very great.

Our sad experiences of July '83 must make us ask ourselves how far are they the result of the growth of inequities and injustices in economic life? To some extent the economic priorities led to political authoritarianism; and the overwhelming political power of the Government led to economic irresponsibility and unconcern for the social and moral obligations in economic life.

The breakdown of law and order has affected the economy badly. The question has also to be asked whether the unsatisfactory nature of the economic growth and distribution also caused the violence of recent years. How far were ethnic rivalries fanned by economic factors?

A lesson Sri Lanka has to learn is that the economy cannot be left merely to private enterprise and market forces without adequate regulations and direction for social justice to the races, classes and regions. In this connection the saying of U.S. President John F. Kennedy has a message for us: "If the free society cannot provide for the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."

More recent trends towards gangsterdom throughout the country are indications that the breakdown of law and order is taking the direction of an attack on the "haves" by those who wish to benefit from this situation. If present trends are not checked the economic life of the country will be affected even more seriously and universally.

3. Non-Alignment in Foreign policy

Our non-alignment in the conflicts of the super-power blocs was another characteristic of the Sri Lankan

national identity during the period after 1956. It was linked to our option for a mixed economy with political democracy. Prior to 1956 the British had military and naval bases in Ceylon. If these had not been terminated we would probably have been somewhat imbrogled in the South East Asian wars of the 1960s and 1970s and the West Asian conflicts of the 1980s. It would have been difficult to have chosen a middle path in economic development given a military alliance with the Western powers. Likewise alignment with one or other of the Socialist blocs would have pushed us towards dependence on it.

Non-alignment was an approach in foreign policy which enabled us to keep at bay, for some time, the big transnational corporations of the capitalist world. These are the principal economic agents of the post-Independence penetration of poor countries by the rich capitalist powers. These companies develop the alliances between the elites of poor countries and those of the rich capitalist countries in which their capital is based. In the 1970s and 1980s multinational capital operates from some friendly non-Western countries which offer bases for investment in joint ventures and for spreading their tentacles in other poor countries.

Our policy of nationalizing the foreign owned plantations and some other industrial and trading enterprises were not revolutionary or even necessarily radical changes. They could have been used by the local elites to strengthen their economic position vis-a-vis the poorer classes. Nationalization could have been community-oriented in its management and distribution of profits, or it could be a means of enlarging the State sector for the benefit of the already well-to-do and managing class. All the same these actions were a check on the growth of the power of the big transnational corporations in Sri Lanka.

The 1975 split in the United Front Government in which the Marxist L.S.S.P was excluded from power was partly due to a veering of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party leadership towards inviting foreign investment on terms more favourable to these. This was a significant stage of a more decided shift in policy of the Sri Lanka Governments. Yet foreign capital did not come in readily, as the alignment with the capitalist powers was not so clear.

After 1977, our economic policy was based on a definite alignment with the capitalist countries. We wanted their capital in different forms of aid. In return for such aid we accepted the policy directions of the World Bank and of the International Monetary Fund. It was on this basis that the Rupee was devalued, the economy liberalized and the country opened for foreign investments. With this policy we became more and more linked to the world capitalist system economically. We have seen the political consequences of these economic options. Internationally we became too weak to take an independent position in foreign policy. We could not express categorical condemnation of Western new imperial exploits as in Grenada or the Falklands. We had to give concessions to them for the installation of the "Voice of America" transmission station in Sri Lanka. There is also mention of handing over certain facilities at Trincomalee to the United States. We are thus less non-aligned than before or rather we are more aligned with the United States and the Western powers. The application made by Sri Lanka to join "ASEAN" is another indication of our pro-western and pro-Japanese orientation. In foreign policy and investment policy we are closer to South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore than ever before.

Our foreign policy is connected to our ethnic problem. If there is a conflict for the division of the country into separate states one group or the other is like-

ly to invite a close interest and even action by the superpowers. One or other of them may be interested in supporting one side or the other. In any case the Indian "concern" will be quite active as we have already seen in 1983. China too may have an interest in our conflicts. A divided Sri Lanka will easily be a prey to big power politics and conflicts.

If we wish to preserve our unity as one nation and at the same time resolve our problems amicably and democratically it is essential that the central government be non-aligned and that other groups such as the TULF and the Tamil militants should not seek or accept support from any outside power - specially the big powers. Indian non-intervention is also an essential condition for such a stance of non-alignment by Sri Lanka. The crisis of 1983 has already meant that India has expressed, through unofficial channels its strong indication that if any foreign military intervention is required it should be India's and no one else's.

There is thus a close relationship between our non-alignment, our middle path in economic policy, our democratic freedoms and the peaceful living together of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim peoples in Sri Lanka. If we give up any one of these we may not have either peace or freedom. We may lose both. Sri Lanka has preserved a delicate balance of freedom and peace in an authoritarian world due to these characteristics of our modern national identity, worked out in the shadow of India's own options and international position.

A conclusion from these considerations seems to be that for the operation of a genuine democratic system, specially in a poor country, it should not be totally tied to the strict orthodoxy of one extreme or the other. Likewise there should be freedom from subordination to one or other of the superpowers and their power blocs.

Hence the importance of our non-alignment. We need genuine democracy for without it the substance of freedom is meaningless for the majority of the people and our Independence would have been in vain.

4. Social Problems Aggravated

The situation of the country in relation to the economic and political aspects was worsened by the social factors. The economic processes had tended to increase inequality. The socio-economic survey of the Central Bank for 1978-79 showed an increase in the gap between the rich and the poor. Many think that inequality has been growing during the past few years. The poor, specially the villages have been badly hit, among other things, by the regular and worsening drought conditions. The supply of pipe water as in the South in some areas is a very great service to the people.

The drought is a result of decades of bad management of our resources. The big trees in many forests have been cut down for timber. This has been going on for sometime. It has been accelerated in the recent period, partly due to the boom in housing construction. The felling of trees has been to a great extent connected with the lenience of the public authorities, and sometimes associated with illegal activities that had the approval or connivance of the local political authorities. This is one aspect of the large-scale corruption that is rampant in the country. Huge forest belts have been illegally destroyed in this manner.

In any case the water level in some parts of the country seems to be going down. Wells and tanks go dry sometimes making it impossible for people to cultivate their fields for two seasons at a stretch. This can be seen in the South of the country, in Uva as well as the North Central and North Western provinces. If this trend

continues, people will suffer much hardship in spite of the many agricultural projects of the Government. The water shortage affects the power supply. Connected with this is the huge increase in kerosene oil prices, which affects the budget of poor families.

Farmers costs are rising due to increase in the price of oil, increasing cost of hiring tractors, of fertilizers - in addition to shortage of water. They are unable to pay their debts and the water taxes that are levied on them. Some farmers have the advantage of the irrigation water and of the availability of fertilizer and equipment at a price. Very much depends on the rains. How far these spells of drought are due to our own action, and how far they are part of a larger South Asian phenomenon needs to be looked into.

In spite of the enormous and unprecedented public expenditure on development projects, there is evidence that malnutrition has been increasing during the past few years. Among children of the age group below five years malnutrition now is about 30% in the rural areas and around 50% in the plantations. The situation has thus become worse.

The increase in the cost of living is so high and continuing that fixed income receivers are experiencing much hardship. On the estates a man still earns around Rs.16 per day for his normal work and a woman Rs.14/=.With this they can hardly feed a family when a measure of rice is Rs.6.50 and a coconut ranges from Rs.4-6.50. Further there is no assured work each day of the working week or month.

Goods are available in plenty unlike under the previous regime; but a good many people do not have the money to buy the essentials for subsistence. On the other hand many more things now seem essential due to their

availability and the impact of the mass-media. Wants have increased, while basic needs can hardly be met.

Health Services have deteriorated in recent years. Hospitals have or are being built, but there is an increasing shortage of doctors, nurses and drugs in the Government hospitals which provide free medical care to all. The services of doctors is less available due to migration of medical practitioners to other countries. This may be remedied with the increase in the numbers passing out from the medical faculties and the lack of opportunities for migration. But the facility for doctors to do private practice has in general reduced the attention given to non-paying patients in public institutions. The price of drugs too has increased very much. There is a shortage of drugs in the government health services, but there is an abundance of drugs in the private pharmacies. The transnational drug producers have now a ready market in Sri Lanka thanks to import liberalization and the softening of Government's policy of selective drug imports on a rational basis. In this the more progressive policies of the previous regime have been given up to the detriment of the poorer classes. Those who have the money can now obtain the best medical attention and drugs. The poor have to take what comes their way. The spirit of capitalism has thus entrenched itself in the health services also.

The social disparity in the lifestyle of the elite specially in the urban areas and their ostentatious living is made known to the whole country by the spread of television. The people returning from the Middle East are generally from the poorer income groups. They get an opportunity to lift themselves up economically and socially. Much of their earnings tend to be spent on land and housing which increases land values in the villages. As yet they invest less on productive enterprises. Much attention is paid to the purchase of consumer goods spe-

cially electronic equipment. This too increases the demand for such goods which are signs of affluence. It is of significance that during the July '83 disturbances such goods were much sought after by looters. Now in 1984 gangs of robbers have begun to take away forcibly such goods and cash from Middle East returnees.

The Educational system and its problems too tend to aggravate the ethnic tensions. The segregation of the children according to the language media - Sinhala and Tamil - affects education even where there are ethnically mixed populations. The text books tend to teach history and literature in such a way as to heighten the ethnic tensions within the minds of the children. These too are a result of policies of several decades.

Bribery and Corruption have become more institutionalized under the present dispensation. The open economy with foreign investment has increased the opportunities for tenders, contracts, commissions and bribes. The huge development projects and import of commodities have increasingly benefitted some contractors and traders. This contrasts sharply with the difficulties of the rise in the cost of living which ordinary people all over the country experience. The rather lackadaisical approach of the public authorities in relation to corruption even among the peoples representatives further complicates the situation. Examples of politicians implicated in corrupt practices being shown more favours are well known to the public. These make people sceptical concerning the rulers, and rather callous themselves. Inflation has increased the amount and the extent of the corruption. It is also said that the corruption in relation to such contracts provides incomes for the maintenance of groups of thugs who are used for political purposes. The Referendum prevented people from getting rid of some corrupt members of Parliament. Prior to the Referendum the Presi-

dent promised to carry out a clean up among the MPs of his ruling party. A party committee was appointed for this. But nothing came out of it. If anything corruption has worsened since then.

The increase of violence in the media, specially television has an effect of encouraging violence in social life. It is said that the way people overturned thousands of vehicles and set fire in July 1983 to them were learnt from T.V. shows concerning other riot torn countries like Lebanon.

The abuses of sex due to tourism are also a cause of socially undesirable relationships - even though these bring foreign exchange to the country and income to people. The Government seems to be rather lax in its attitude towards the large-scale increase of prostitution - both male and female. These are closely related to tourism which is a major project of the Government.

The Government's package of policies which include an almost servile promotion of tourism, the large scale migration of families within the country and of young men and women to the Middle East, the concentration of young women workers in the Free Trade Zone area, the liberalization of the import of all manner of literature and drugs have led to an increase in the incidence of venereal diseases specially in places of touristic residence such as areas on the sea coast to the South and North of Colombo.

In recent years there has been a great increase in the numbers of women resorting to abortion. This too has a relationship to the greater information concerning and availability of means of abortion, as well as the promiscuity of relationships. Perhaps the increase in the number of single parent families due to the migration to the Middle East may also be a cause of the phenomenal

increase in the number of abortions. According to a report in the "Week-End" there are as many as 500 abortions each day in and around Colombo City. This may be a figure on the high side but medical practitioners even in small towns report that daily three of four persons come to them for abortion.

The rapid spread of the use of narcotics, even among children of school-going age, is another social evil of the present openness to the international economy and cultural trends. Tourists are among the more notorious of the pedlars of such drugs like LSD. The use of drugs is becoming a grave social problem that can seriously affect the life of the young people. In the fits of hallucination and exuberance consequent on drugs they do many wrong deeds which they would not do in their normal lives. It is said that some perpetrators of violence during the communal disturbances were fortified by liquor and drugs to perform their inhuman acts.

Growing inequality, malnutrition among the poor, consumerism of the elite, bribery and corruption, violence in the media, the spread of drugs, venereal diseases and abortion all contribute to the breakdown of our social life and its values. The communal violence may be seen as related to such prevalent social evils which take away the respect for human life and civilized living.

The migration of workers to the Middle East is becoming one of our main sources of foreign exchange earnings. But this too has a high social cost. Are we not selling our women and men as part payment for the oil that we import? The price paid is also in terms of people having to leave their homes and families. There are many single parent families among the 150,000 or so who have thus migrated. Children tend to be neglected. They receive money, but not the love and attention of father and or mother. Sometimes the women are away and the men

remain at home. Many families break-up due to the prolonged absence of one of the spouses. All these have a bad effect on the children. Already there are instances of child disequilibrium. There is bound to be an increase in the future. It is unfortunate that the government is little concerned or unable to do anything meaningful concerning the inhuman treatment meted out to Sri Lankans, specially housemaids, in the Middle East. Some are even killed and the family gets back only the corpse of their relative. Thus despite its many advantages, major social problems are caused by this large scale migration sometimes called the "Twentieth Century version of the Slave Trade".

The urban shanties are another group of socially underprivileged people. They live permanently under conditions which are unfit for human habitation. They see the affluence of many in the city compared to their own misery. The shanty people were among those who benefitted from the loot of the more well-to-do Tamil families in Colombo. There was thus a criss-crossing of class and race in these events. The poor Sinhala, Islamic and sometimes even Tamil people attacked the better off Tamil homes.

In Colombo city the Sri Lankan Tamils are on an average, economically better off than the other communities. This is because those who come to Colombo from the North are persons who are not expecting jobs as workers. Among the Colombo urban poor in the shanties there was hardly any communal violence. They even looked after their Tamil neighbours and friends during the worst days. This was an aspect of the solidarity of the poor among themselves. Similar situations are seen in some smaller towns like Ambalantota where 7-8 Tamil shop keepers gave up their business and left the place, whereas 75-80 poorer Tamil labourers remained and were protected by the Sinhala people, specially their employers who benefit

from their labour. In all these the ethnic problem has been complicated by the economic and social aspect.

5. A Decline in Public Morality

To these we have to add the moral aspects of our present societal problems. People have been steadily losing confidence in the moral rectitude of the rulers. This is due to a long string of events in which the promises of justice and righteousness have not been honoured by the rulers. This has been seen in several issues such as the way of amending the Constitution as and when it suits the ruling party, the attitude towards tourism, prostitution, mob-violence, consumerism, exploitation of workers, women and youth. The way in which the opposition parties have been dealt with, including the Referendum of 22nd December of 1982 has led to a serious erosion of confidence concerning the respect of the rulers for democratic processes. The attitude towards the judiciary has been ambiguous; alongside the rhetoric and constitutional provisions for the independence of the judiciary, there has been a disrespect for its decisions, and even an attack on the judges in different forms, including inaction by the Police when mobs insulted Supreme Court Judges in the heart of Colombo in broad day light in June 1983. There have been open accusations that vehicles belonging to public corporations were used in this operation. But no action has been taken against anyone yet.

The people are not convinced by the propaganda of the Government around certain issues, such as the decision not to hold general elections on the grounds that there was a "Naxalite" conspiracy to overthrow the Government and kill the President, Prime Minister and some leaders of the Opposition. This was given as the reason for the Referendum. The manner of appointing members of Parliament and the increase in the number of Ministers

to over 80 has reduced the confidence in the Government's concern for public opinion.

In 1977 the United National Party came forward with an electoral manifesto promising a free, just and righteous society. However over the six years prior to July 1983 it went against the substance of these promises while maintaining the public rhetoric of setting up a "democratic, socialist republic in Sri Lanka. The political evolution has been largely restrictive of freedom. Representative government hardly exists. Social justice has been given a scant regard in the subservience to the values of capitalism and the demands of foreign investors and creditors. The human rights to workers have been trampled under foot with the use of legal means and mob violence. The peasants, youth, students, women, ethnic minorities all feel they have been badly treated when they brought up a question of social justice such as the increasing cost of living.

The demands of morality seem to have had too little impact on the government when it decided its policies on tourism, on the free trade zone, on migration to the Middle East. Here too, money seems to dictate public policies. While tourists who are said to bring in foreign exchange and foreign investors who supply capital are given almost every privilege they ask for, the plantation workers and the Middle East migrants who are our principal foreign exchange earners are grossly neglected concerning their human rights.

The violent situation in the North has made the country in general too accustomed to the terror tactics of the youth militants and the torture exercised by the security forces and the police. There has been growing insensitivity to human suffering and even human life.

A further relevance of public morality is that the people lose confidence in the rulers, even in the chief executive in whom ultimately all executive and now legislative power rests, with five sixth of the members of Parliament having to hand over to him their undated letters of resignation. This is an immense responsibility and burden on the President to whose office all the country's problems are brought.

Quite a few of the ethical norms enshrined in the Constitution of 1978 have thus been progressively denied in the process of living. Human life tends to be reduced to a thing which can be bought and sold in the market. The moral rectitude of religious leaders may have been diluted by the conferring of privileges and the grant of public funds for their institutions.

In many of these problems the rulers may have been successful at each point in so far as political tactics and strategies have won the day. But this has not necessarily been a triumph of statesmanship and virtue. Due to all these the people are becoming rather sceptical about the expressed word or good intentions of the rulers. They tend to be cynical, demoralized and sometimes even callous in the attitude to law and order as they feel that those in power use power for their own benefit.

While these trends have been present under previous regimes also, this Government has made the most frequent proclamation to its intention to be righteous. Yet the present is also the time when moral laxity in public life seems the greatest. Hence also the impact on people's relationships in which morality is less and less honoured. The co-option of most of the intellectual and cultural leaders either by rewards or by threats to serve the establishment is one of the worst forms of moral decline. Their own lack of intellectual and spiritual courage, however understandable in the circumstances,

is an indication of the gravely diseased nature of our public life. Our crisis is therefore one of the moral rectitude of our entire public life, social relations and cultural values.

6. A Wholistic Understanding

It is within this situation of political economic, social and moral crisis in Sri Lanka that the ethnic explosion of 1983 took place. The main issue was ethnic, but all these factors were also involved and inter-related. Several issues, conflicts and trends came together in that last week of July to bring about our worst and most inhuman explosion of violence of this whole century.

The political problem affects the people of the South also very much. There is a very deep discontent in the South that has to be understood. They feel that Tamil leaders can now go anywhere in the world and be received as leaders of a people, but the Southern political leaders who do not agree with the ruling powers can be imprisoned, presented as conspirators and agents of the communal violence without their having any appeal to a judicial forum. The Executive can make decisions about imprisonment of persons and proscription of political parties without reference to the Judiciary. The Executive had a major say in the denial of civic rights of persons.

This situation is partly a consequence of the July riots, after which the Executive took some such actions. In searching for a resolution to the ethnic question we cannot close our eyes to these problems, for we will then be lacking in objectivity and a concern for human rights.

The whole process of the erosion of the people's rights makes it now very difficult for us to have a Sri Lankan identify with political democracy. A Sri Lankan

identity with authoritarian rule, would be to surrender power to a single person or party. Not even the Government MPs want this as they themselves would not be secure. We must therefore work for the restoration of representative democracy where members of Parliament truly represent their people freely. The present Parliament is an expensive show piece of democracy in which the price of dissent by any Government MPs is dismissal from Parliament, and this discredits Parliament itself.

We have a chance of remedying this situation as we have still a measure of freedom left. We should press for a removal of repressive legislation alongside a solution of the problems of violence in the North. There should be a control of mob violence, an ensuring of the independence of the Judiciary and a restoration of the powers of Parliament. These should be part of a package of solutions to the national political problem, in addition to specific solutions for the issues concerning ethnic relations.

In the economy we must come to a situation in which money is not the primary motor of the economy. There should be means by which the economy is directed towards the common good of all human beings. It needs to be monitored, analysed and directed accordingly. We must develop more self-reliance among the people, otherwise the devolution of political authority will not be so meaningful. There should be a return to a form of mixed economy with a more judicious control over imports, greater protection of local production and more reliance on Sri Lankan technicians, experts, scholars and enterprise. There should be a policy of reducing income inequalities, more supports for the poor people and a balanced development in relation to ethnic groups. We must have changes in the direction of equity in economic relations, if we are to have an identity that can be maintained along with political democracy.

We need a return to morality in public life, as well as in private life. There should be an exposure of the fundamental immorality in public life - where we say one thing and do another. Unless the people are prepared to do so publicly there will be no cure for our public moral evils. Religions themselves must endeavour to be guided by their fundamental values, and not let themselves be bought up by capital or frightened by the powerful.

We have therefore a responsibility to make an overall approach to understand and save Sri Lanka and its national identity. We must elaborate the type of political system we want, what are the rights of dissent, what are the terms and limits of majority rule, what are the fundamental rights which are the due of all including the minorities? What is the type of economy we want; what are the feasible, manageable, tolerable limits within which we can have private and public enterprise subjected to regular people's review such as through elections and free discussion?

All, specially leaders in society, have a responsibility to create public opinion concerning these issues so that we may respect all persons as human beings, endowed with a dignity and rights that are never fully subordinate to any political power. We must set up mechanisms for institutionalizing the process of social change if we do not want a recurrence of the type of events of July 1983. This is a mission in which the religions can bring a message of liberation from the evils of selfishness and seeking for power. This can be done along with the values and forces of secular humanism, liberal democracy and socialism. If we think and work in these directions, we have a chance to evolve as a free people after the experience of the last 36 years of Independence and to shape the national identity of this country respecting all persons of different ethnic groups as well as the poor and the weak. How can we care for the Tamils in the

North and the plantations if we do not care for the neglected poor in the shanties next door in our city? This is a challenge to our humanity, our spirituality to our civilization.

A vision of a Sri Lankan national identity has to be built on the acceptance of the positive values of all races, religions and cultures in our country. In doing so we can and must transcend any limitations in each of these by accentuating the undergirding value of the human person in each of us. This is, of course, the best in the traditions of all our religions and cultures. Our common humanity can be the foundation of our togetherness beyond any divisive trends. This is sung every day in our National Anthem. We are children of the same Mother Lanka. There is an enriching variety and plurality in our cultures and religions. Our openness to the one world of the 21st Century can and must be based on our acceptance of the values of the cultures of every ethnic group in Sri Lanka. We must thus try to build a society that is non-dominant and is fulfilling for all. For the first time in many centuries we have the challenge and the opportunity to consciously attempt the moulding of our national unity by and through the acceptance and respect for our diversities.

Here we agree with His Excellency the President when he said at a seminar on "Democratic Socialism in Sri Lanka", that we are facing a crisis of civilization, "On my part I must take a large measure of the blame for the traumatic experience we have all gone through.

It is to my mind not a crisis only of political and economic decline but also of a crisis of civilization.

Let us put our heads together and find out why some of these events occurred and how we can avoid them in future."

The issue is about the evolving of a civilized way of living in society, and of resolving our conflicts with understanding and tolerance by dialogue and consensus.

The President has taken a large share of the responsibility for this present tragedy. We must also all take our own share and work together towards building a United Lanka in which all the individuals and groups can live as free persons whose dignity and rights are respected at all levels. This is a principal task of this generation of Sri Lankans.

PART III

A POLITICALLY NEGOTIATED SOLUTION REQUIRED*

Therefore the problem of Tamil nationalism must be resolved politically by negotiation. Otherwise Sri Lanka is likely to be torn by violence as Northern Ireland, Lebanon, and Cyprus are. No self-respecting Government can accept to be bullied by terrorists into a position of military surrender. Further Sinhala nationalism will also tend to counter such a surrender. On the other hand the Tamils as a people will also not want to accept domination by a government that they consider alien to themselves and their interests.

A political solution is also required due to the wide dispersal of the Tamil people throughout the country. The Tamils of the North and East are now settled in the West and South also. There are far too many of them with their economic interests outside the North, for the Tamil people as a whole to be in favour of the setting up of a separate sovereign state in the North. The Tamils of the East are also not so enthusiastic about this, partly as it will mean moving their capital city from Colombo to Jaffna.

Over a quarter of the Sri Lankan Tamils (in 1971, 365000 out of 1,415,567) are in the seven Sinhala majority provinces. Colombo is the biggest city of Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka. The one million plantation workers in the Central province have already indicated that they

* This section is taken verbatim from "Quest" 74, published in June 1984. The All Party Conference has since been called and began its sessions on 10th January 1984.

think of their future in relation to a single Sri Lanka, even though several tens of thousands of them have moved to the buffer area between the Northern and North Central Provinces. Being in a no-man's-land between two quarrelling peoples is little consolation for them.

In a division into two separate sovereign states the Moors and Malays who are about a million people would be divided between them. Only about 18% of them are in the predominantly Sri Lankan Tamil Areas of North and East. All the minorities other than the Sri Lankan Tamils would be opposed to a division of the country. In much of the discussion on this issue the position of the important Muslim minority is not given adequate attention.

For a political solution to be workable it is necessary that the Sinhala, Moors, Malays and Burghers and the Sri Lanka government understand and appreciate Tamil nationalism, and that the Tamil people and their leaders recognize that the Sinhala people will be determinedly against a division of Sri Lanka into two sovereign states. If and when the majority community appreciates and respects Tamil nationalism they will be more ready to accept an intermediate solution such as with District Councils, Regional Councils or even Federation. When such a solution is worked in practice it is likely that terrorism will be less meaningful to the vast majority of the people in the North, if it does not cease altogether; and a Sinhala Police or army also unnecessary in the Tamil areas for purposes of ordinary law and order.

In order that there may be an adequate political will in all concerned to agree to a negotiated solution of the problems of communal relations in Sri Lanka, it is necessary that all groups recognize that the present

policies and militant polarization are a serious threat to the entire fabric of Sri Lankan national political, economic and cultural life. We are now in danger of throwing away our chance of a civilized way of living for ourselves and for many succeeding decades.

There is however, no need for us to think that the problems are insoluble by peaceful means. Sinhala and Tamil peoples have lived together in this island for over 2000 years and most of this long period has been one of peaceful living together. We do not have to think that we have to end up like a Northern Ireland where the British have settled a large alien population on Irish soil during the past 450 years. Sinhala and Tamil are not like British and Irish; Protestants and Catholics have been at loggerheads throughout the 450 years and are coming to peaceful ecumenical relations only now. Buddhists and Hindus, on the contrary, have lived together harmoniously for over 2500 years in this island too. They have shared a common background tradition of religious thinking. They worship in the same shrines in many parts of the country.

While we do not despair of solutions, we should not lull ourselves with the thought that issues that are so deep and wounds that have hurt so much can be resolved by mere military or political strategy. A genuine change of heart is required beginning with the leadership of the two main ethnic groups for a satisfactory solution to be agreed on by negotiation.

There must be a genuine recognition and appreciation by all that both Sinhala nationalism and Tamil nationalism are legitimate aspirations of two peoples with historical traditions and roots in this country from time immemorial. Their rights to language, culture, religion need to be recognized and guaranteed even with a certain territorial base for their flowering and fulfilment. We must likewise recognize the rights of all other peoples

in this country. It is thus that we can build a truly Sri Lankan identity that respects the rights of all.

While we recognize that a united Sri Lanka is the best form of political structure for these two national groups to live in harmony and develop themselves in the modern world, we have to realize that such a unity in one State is acceptable only if the rights of the peoples of both these national groups are recognized and guaranteed adequately. That is to say, while the people as a whole are sovereign; one single race should not be able to exercise this sovereignty permanently over the other race or races. There must be a sharing of the people's sovereignty. This must be guaranteed constitutionally. It cannot be left to the whims of persons who happen to be in power at the Centre at a given time. Nor can the rights of the minorities be at the mercy of the vagaries of the political rivalries of the parties of the majority.

Government by majority rule is unacceptable if it means a permanent domination of the minority by the majority be it of race, language, culture or religion. This is the crux of the constitutional problem in relation to the Sinhala and Tamil people. The Tamil people demand at least a measure of self management to be guaranteed constitutionally.

Devolution of certain powers to bodies representing small areas or groups is one way in which there can be a united Sri Lanka with a measure of autonomy for smaller groups. This has been the request of the Tamil people, specially since 1956 when they opted for a federal form of state in Sri Lanka. The demand for Eelam came as a result of the frustration with the attempts at negotiated solutions from the 1940s to 1972. It need not be taken as necessarily meaning that all or most of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka or even in the North want a partition

of Sri Lanka into two separate sovereign states. This is only a demand of last resort; and will take place only if peaceful convivance in one state is impossible.

We believe that if there is a sufficient and genuine devolution of authority to the people of the North and East the aspirations of the Tamil people can be largely met within a united Sri Lanka. The preparedness of the vast majority of the Tamil leaders and people to try to operate the District Development Councils since 1981 is an indication of this implicit desire for togetherness. Is this not an equally meaningful voice in favour of a united Sri Lanka as the demand for a separate sovereign state of Eelam?

Having been bitten several times in the past by promises of Sinhala political leaders, the Tamil people will not be easily taken for a ride once again with promises that cannot or are not meant to be implemented. It is the Sinhala political leaders who have in the past had the initiative in offering solutions and also withdrawing them. If a satisfactory resolution of this issue is to be made the Sinhala leaders and people must be prepared to accept a genuine devolution of some authority to the North and East. It is the price for the preservation of the unity of the country, which in effect means the power of the majority community in relation to what is retained by the central government; such as defence, finance and foreign affairs. Such a devolution must be spelt out in terms of powers, availability of finance, and public servants to implement policies. There should also be constitutional provision for resolving disputes arising in the implementation of such shared powers of government as between the centre and the smaller units or areas.

1. Political Aspects

We need a political solution in the sense of one negotiated politically and not decided by arms. Such a resolution must have a political aspect also, in addition to economic, cultural and other policies. A main political solution that is immediately feasible is the proper functioning of the District Development Councils (D.D.Cs)

(a) Development Councils (D.D.Cs)

The DC Act is inadequate in many ways; yet even this has not been implemented in a manner that seriously devolves authority to the Development Councils. The functions of the Development Council include the approval of the annual development plan and implementation of the plan through the Executive Committee of the Council. The subjects over which District Development Councils have jurisdiction are:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Agrarian Services | 11. Housing |
| 2. Agriculture | 12. Irrigation Works |
| 3. Animal Husbandry | (which are not of an |
| 4. Cooperative Development | interdistrict character) |
| 5. Cultural affairs | 13. Land use and land Deve- |
| 6. Education | lopment |
| 7. Employment | 14. Rural Development |
| 8. Fisheries | 15. Small and medium scale |
| 9. Food | industries |
| 10. Health Services | |

The Executive Committee of the Development Council (DC) comprises the District Minister (DM) who is a nominee of the President of the Republic, the Chairman of the D.C. and two other members of the D.C. selected by the D.M. with the concurrence of the Chairman. Thus the Executive Committee is not really chosen by and responsible to the D.C. or the district electorate.

For preparing the annual development plan for the district the Executive Committee begins with the draft development proposals, in the subjects specified as coming within its purview, prepared by the Central Government ministers in charge of the various subjects. The Exe. Com. then formulates other proposals in consultation with the appropriate minister and prepares an annual development plan incorporating any or all such proposals. It is this plan that is then submitted through the minister to the D.C. (art 35 and 39 of DC Act).

The development plan is initially prepared by the ministers of the Central Government. The D.C. can only amend, revise or add to it. Once thus adopted by the D.C. the plan goes back to the appropriate minister of the Central Government, where it may, presumably be further vetted. The primacy in the formulation of development plans is thus with the ministers of the Central Government.

Once approved, the implementation of the district development plan is by the D.C. through the Executive Committee i.e. through the District Minister and the District Administration appointed by and responsible to the Centre. The result is that the much desired "participation" at district level is in fact virtually non-existent in either plan formulation or plan implementation.

There is no real devolution of powers. These still remain in the Centre. The district, through its D.C. has been given in general the appearance but not the reality of decision-making. Instead, some of the processes of implementation of programmes, determined primarily by the Centre, have been pushed down to the district level. In a sense the Development Councils Act is one which results in a greater centralization of power with the D.M. as Chief Executive in the district and the minister of Local Government having power to dissolve a Development Council. The D.C. is largely an advisory Council.

The areas allocated are wide, though the functions and powers have been circumscribed very much in the D.D.C. law. But even these limited functions could not be implemented because;

- a) the funds made available to the DDCs proper are minimal. The Jaffna Development Council is said to have less money than what the Village Councils and Town Councils obtained earlier.
- b) The District Service required for administering the work of the Development Council has not been set-up.
- c) Those controlling power at the Centre, be they ministers or officials, are said to be reluctant to give up powers they presently exercise.

Thus the DDCs have been very much a forum for the people to express their views but not an effective means of deciding development policy and implementing it. The T.U.L.F. has tried to put up a glamorous front in Jaffna in inaugurating D.D.C. affairs with a "Throne Speech" and other external paraphernalia of representative government. But they have been powerless to develop their district. The elected representatives of DCs are not satisfied, and the people are not satisfied. There is considerable truth in the statement that the D.C.s are an empty shell, apparently meant to please all and satisfying no one. This situation needs to be remedied at least where the people of a district wish to exercise their rights to a measure of self-government.

If necessary the powers of the DDCs should be enlarged to include even law and order under the general direction of the Central government. This we feel is a better way of ensuring law and order than the present arrangement. It is necessary that an inquiry be made as to why this law passed in mid 1980 has been so ineffec-

tive during these past three years. Are there too many deficiencies in the law? Was there a lack of political will at the Centre or elsewhere to implement it? Are those in power at the Centre unwilling to give up a part of their power to the Development Councils? If that is so, and it continues for long, they may lose effective power in the North as already the police have realized. While we encourage the Government in the direction towards devolution of authority intended in the Act we urge it to implement its provisions and its spirit in much greater earnest in the coming years.

(b) Proposals for Amendment of Development Councils Act of 1980

1. The Development Councils to be originators of district development plans, and not merely approvers or implementers of centrally determined plans.
2. DCs should have functions, powers and a life of their own derived from the Constitution and accepted by the major political parties. Changes in the Central government should not upset the working of the D.C.s.
3. DC should have powers of subsidiary legislation concerning the subjects over which it has power. Such legislation should not be subject to a veto by the national executive, but should not be contradictory to the laws passed by the Central legislature.
4. The majority of the members of the D.C. should be elected at elections for the D.C. The members of Parliament should be less than half the total number of members of DCs.
5. The Executive power of the D.C. should be vested in a chairman and members of the Executive Committee elected by the D.C. They should be responsible to the

D.C The District Minister is to be a member of the Executive Council but not head of the district executive. The District Minister may exercise executive power in relation to subjects reserved to the Central Government. There should thus be no clash between powers of the D.C. and of the D.M.

6. The D.C. should not have the functions of Town Councils and Village Councils - which should be re-established as the basic units of local government. The D.C. may have some supervisory functions in relation to local government in the district.

7. Adequate finance should be available to the D.C.s. This should be guaranteed legally or constitutionally. The share of different districts can depend on their population and needs for development, taking into account their relative underdevelopment.

8. The DCs should have the services of competent public servants. Provision should be made for public servants to join a district service on a permanent basis or as seconded for a period, with a continuance of their pension rights.

9. The subjects assigned to the DCs to be extended to include law and order in the district, (subject to the central government Ministry of Defence), and other directly local matters such as museums, archaeology.

10. Since not all districts may be interested in accepting such a devolution of authority, each district should be able to make an option to work such a District Development Council. This can be by a district referendum or by the existing development Councils deciding on it.

11. It should be possible for two or more districts to decide to come together concerning all or some of their functions. This option may be exercised by the people at a referendum at the request of the existing Development Councils.

It will be seen that such provisions will mean a more clear devolution of powers to the districts than hitherto. It will go some way in meeting the demand for a measure of regional autonomy. The Central government will have the main functions of government specially in relation of finance, defence, foreign policy and national policies even in relation to subjects entrusted to the districts.

This devolution is in a sense contrary to the centralizing trends of the 1978 Constitution, in setting up an executive presidency. We believe, however, that is only by a measure of genuine devolution of powers from the centre to the districts (or provinces) that the unity of the country can be preserved and made respectful of the legitimate rights of the peoples of the regions. Genuine democracy can and must include measures for people's effective participation in self-government. Such real devolution of power will necessitate a rethinking of the nature of the power of the Central Government. It will have to be less centralized, less directive and more coordinative of initiatives from the districts. Or else the nature of composition and division of power at the Centre itself must be rethought so as to enable legitimate representation of the different ethnic communities in the country in the exercise of central power. At present it is possible for power at the centre to be exercised almost solely by the political parties of the majority community. This has been so since 1953 except for the brief interlude from 1965-68 when the Federal Party had a Cabinet ministry.

2. Concerning Army, Police and Youth Militants

Government policy should be directed towards

- a) winning public confidence in the North concerning its intention of devolving authority to the peoples repre-

sentatives through the D.D.C. or even regional councils at provincial level.

- b) hand over normal law and order functions of the police to the local agencies under the D.D.C...?
- c) Then gradually withdraw or restrict the army to essential military defence activities. The armed forces of the State should not be a means of racial domination of one group by another.
- d) Offer an amnesty to youth militants who lay down their arms. Hence not prosecute them, release political prisoners under P.T.A.
- e) Remove obnoxious clauses of P.T.A.; and above all the authority for the senior police officers and the army to kill and dispose of dead bodies without any judicial inquiry.
- f) The police should be equally vigilant about the breaking of the law by those who support the government as they are of the Tamil youth militants. Unfortunately the police are now acquiring a habit and a reputation for a benevolent neutrality towards thuggery that may have the blessings of some of those in power. This has been increasing since June 1956. Selective and discriminatory investigation by the police makes it liable to the criticism of unfairness.

3. An All Party Conference

The U.N.P. promised in its election manifesto of 1977 to call an All Party Conference to find solutions to the grievances of the Tamil people. The Manifesto recognized the legitimacy of grievances in relation to language, employment, education and land use or colonization. This promise was endorsed by the electorate in so far as the return of the U.N.P. can be thought of as an approval of the policies of the electoral manifesto.

At least this promise was not an impediment to a landslide victory for the U.N.P., it may even have helped to bring it about.

Unfortunately the Government did not implement this promise. It was perhaps lulled to over self-confidence by its victory at the polls and the 5/6th majority in Parliament. Even after three years when considering the Development Council legislation it was not supple enough to obtain the support of all the political parties on an equitable basis. Bi-lateral dialogues between the U.N.P. and the T.U.L.F. good though they be, are inadequate to inspire confidence in their agreements. In any case two years of these have not taken the two peoples towards lasting peace. There must be a genuine change of heart on the part of the government if it is to successfully resolve these issues through an all-party conference.

An All Party Conference is very necessary because the conflict of political parties, specially of the majority community has been the bane of Sri Lankan race relations. Near success was twice thwarted by the major Sinhala Opposition party - in 1957 when the BC pact was abrogated and in 1968 when the DS/C pact was given up. The ambitions and quarrels of political leaders have been a major cause of our people being condemned to nearly 30 years of communal conflict. It is time these leaders seriously decide to subordinate their party interests to the national good. In this the Government of the day has to take the initiative and lead the way.

This is all the more necessary as the Government has been hardly fair by the opposition political parties on certain issues such as the 1978 Constitution, the Referendum and the prolongation of the life of the 1977 Parliament to 1989. These are not the only major issues making the opposition parties antagonistic to the Govern-

ment. The problem then arises of how far these parties can or will cooperate with the Government which, has skilfully though hardly justly, excluded them also from a legitimate share of power in the Central Government. Having got rid of General Elections (till 1989) the Government may have thrown away the chance of obtaining the support of elected representatives of about 40% of the Sinhala people who have consistently voted against the U.N.P. during the past decade. In this sense the Government may be a victim of its own strategies. It has power, de facto. But it cannot easily obtain the loyalty of so many who feel disenfranchised in the South as well. Are not these problems interwoven?

Justice is integral, as is also peace. Unless there is a genuine effort to realize justice in over-all political relationships it is not likely that the Government will be able to obtain the cooperation of all political parties towards the resolution of the issues of the national question on a lasting and long-term basis. Having a popular elected executive president may be a help towards resolving this issue. On the other hand an executive presidency that has subordinated parliament to it and expressed a desire that the judiciary be subject to its directives (in times of war) is less likely to be disposed to share sovereign power with elected representatives of districts.

In spite of all these it is desirable that the Government call an All-Party Conference, all the more so since all the major parties of the Opposition seem to have indicated their desire to cooperate in this. There should however be no undue optimism about success in so delicate a venture as the issues are intricate and intermingled. Political sensitivities will be intolerant of any party claiming the credit for success. Further an All-Party Conference is now inadequate as it is unlikely to have the Tamil youth militants at its table. In this

sense an All-Party Conference in 1977 had much more chance of success.

The announcement made by Mr. A. Amirthalingam, Secretary of the TULF that the MPs of his party would be willing to resign their seats in Parliament and recontest them calling upon the people to give them a mandate to endorse any reasonable solution, that could be agreed upon by the Government and the chief Sinhala parties, is an opportunity that the government should not miss for resolving this major issue.

Even now it is not too late to attempt the utmost in statemanship to resolve this issue once and for all. For this we must all realize its gravity and its intractability to mere force or short term political strategies. If the political leaders fail at this juncture the people of this country will have to suffer much in the coming decade - much more than in the past 30 years.

All persons and groups of the citizens body must press the political leaders towards a solution of this issue. Even if an All-Party Conference is not forthcoming, the Government must go ahead with policies such as the devolution of power to the D.D.Cs.

EPILOGUE (DECEMBER 1983)

The Price of Survival

After July 1983 Sri Lanka faces its gravest crisis of survival as one country and one nation under a single state. Already the power of the Central Government cannot be asserted in considerable parts of the Northern Province at least after dark. An even greater misfortune is the alienation of many people from loyalty to Sri Lanka as one nation - in spite of the 6th Amendment compelling all public servants to take an oath of loyalty to Sri Lanka as a unitary state.

Our crisis is compounded by the inter-mingling of causes and processes. The ethnic conflict and the economic options that the country has taken criss-cross and aggravate our problems. Both these are related to the decaying of the democratic processes and the power struggles among political parties and within many of them. The succession to the presidency is also an issue that is often an unmentioned factor in many political negotiations. The presence of forces of violence in many parts of the country and the restiveness of the forces of law and order who find human rights considerations an impediment to effective control of violence, further complicate the problems. Power holders face the dilemma of choice between suppressing violence by violence and winning over the violent by wise compromises.

The foreign economic, political, military and cultural presence internationalizes our local, national and social issues. We have to solve our domestic problems before the glare of world public opinion - specially of the countries on whom we depend for the "aid" for balancing our budgets and carrying on our development projects. Sri Lankans living in other countries are also deeply affected

by these events. Sometimes the exaggerated versions they receive and the fears they experience for their kith and kin back home make them more pessimistic and less compromising. A few of them worsen matters by helping to augment violence here.

The immediate practical solution required is an agreement on political issues by the political and socio-cultural and religious leaders of the country. The people must be motivated to accept such a solution of peaceful conflict resolution.

The more necessary foundation for ethnic harmony is the genuine acceptance by all of all the peoples of this country as having a right to live, to work and enjoy the common life of our country. Such a respect for others of different races requires a self purification of ourselves both as individuals and ethnic groups. We must have the humility to acknowledge our deficiencies objectively and to see the good in others also. Our human tendency is to see our good and the faults of the others. This general principle of good human relations that we recognize in interpersonal encounter must be taken to the group and community levels.

On this basis we must build our confidence in each other. The Sinhala people must have confidence that the Tamil people are loyal to one united Sri Lanka. They must be helped to come to such an act of confidence by the actions and attitudes of the Tamil leaders and people. On the other hand the Tamil people must have confidence that the majority Sinhala people will be happy to see the flowering of the Tamil way of life in the areas in which they are in significant numbers. This is to be partly by a devolution of authority to the local areas all over the country. The Sinhala people should be happy to see the Tamils doing well according to their own genius. The Muslims and Burghers can help cement this sense of solidarity

among the two major ethnic groups in the different parts of the country. The Tamils of the plantation areas must indicate their willingness to make Sri Lanka their home and nationality, and the rest of the country must accept them as an integral part of our national community.

Confidence generates confidence. This is the antidote to the spiral of fear, distrust, suspicion and hatred that leads to ever escalating violence.

In this sense our peoples are going through, not merely an unprecedented political and economic crisis but are also facing a deep spiritual challenge as persons and groups.

If we are not to lose the opportunity of rebuilding our homes and hearts, our institutions and relationships out of the chaos of today our analysis of the causes of the present crisis must be realistic, frank and deep. There should be no sacred cows to be preserved from such a genuine scrutiny. This is a challenge to truth and honesty. Truth is no respecter of power, privilege and position. Sooner or later the truth will stare us in the face, specially if vice masquerades for virtue. We are truly facing "a crisis of civilization", i.e. of civilized living in our small country. All of us must examine ourselves, ask what is it we live for, and find means of providing each other an opportunity for our re-education, and where necessary re-charting our course in societal relationships in political, economic and cultural and spiritual life.

A process of humble and sincere acceptance, of each other and reconciliation requires responsive listening, frankness, understanding the other's background. We have to see how much we have grown up in segregated environments. Most Sinhalese do not know how the Tamils feel. Most Tamils likewise do not know Sinhala feelings. The English

speaking do not generally read Sinhala and Tamil publications. The older generation do not realize how the youth are motivated, and vice versa. The peaceful do not understand the violence of the prevailing peace. The militant do not realize the grave dangers of violence, which can be more universal than they may calculate, or may have the result opposite to what they expect.

Reconciliation requires a movement away from hardened positions to understand the point of view of the other. This is basic to the working of democracy. Seeing the other's point of view and responding to others needs, as if they were ours, is an essential way of life in all our religions.

Reconciliation requires listening, dialogue, mutual conversion. This cannot take place unless people meet each other across barriers of race, religion, class and even distance. We must begin by positing good will in others. Mistakes are not necessarily due to malice; they are often a consequence of ignorance, and of our being closed in our own culture and attitudes.

All the same where there are grave wrongs as have happened recently, we need a deeper spirit of repentance, reparation, forgiveness, pardon and reconciliation. It is in being reconciled with the other that we achieve inner reconciliation within ourselves, with nature and the transcendent being or values we accept.

Such reconciliation is the deepest level of national harmony that we must seek to realize. It is the best foundation for a united Lanka and for integrated and harmonious human personalities.

Processes of dialoguing, meditative self-purification, breaking down prejudices, accepting basic human values, reconciliation all need to be developed in approaching these difficult and emotion-charged issues.

There are no short cuts to success in facing this grave moral crisis. It is an identity crisis for the ethnic groups, the religions, the political parties, the voluntary organizations and of the whole country. What does it mean to be a human person: a Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim or Burgher, a Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or Christian? What is the significance of being a Sri Lankan? What is the purpose of power in society? Is power a service to all or is it used by some to dominate others?

Such a process of national reconciliation requires an intense massive effort on the part of all the agents of mass education, the mass media, the religious and cultural leaders, trade unions and other peoples movements and in a special manner the political parties. The political parties have to realize that their own ambitions and rivalries have contributed in no small measure to the embittering of our peoples on whom they depend for their power. If violence is not to be resorted to, there must be groups committed to non-violent processes of conflict resolution. For these to be effective there must be democratic spaces for peaceful dissent. For this the power holders must be ready to respond to peoples needs and demands.

The price of our survival as a nation is, in the political field, a solution concerning the sharing of governmental powers and national resources to be brought about by peaceful negotiation. This requires a give and take among all groups. In effect this means the virtual agreement to a pact for the setting up of our nation of many peoples on the basis of the free consensus of all. This has not yet taken place in modern times. In fact Sri Lanka has not had one Sri Lankan ruler governing the whole country with the freely acknowledged loyalty of all the peoples for many centuries. It has not been so since the 16th century when Europeans invaded this country.

Prof. K.M. de Silva places the last such common Sri Lankan

ruler in the 12th century i.e. over 700 years ago. This explains the deep-seated nature of our problem and the historic task, responsibility and opportunity of our generation.

Ours is a many sided crisis of which we have discussed mainly some of the political aspects. We need a package of solutions and approaches that can enable us to meet this challenge of our situation.

We will either emerge from this crisis more chastened, humble and purified or go deeper into hatred, conflict, destruction and despair. We must do our utmost to come out of this sad morass with a deep consciousness of the human dignity of every person in our country and with more effective ways of building a democratic and just society in the coming decade.

The triumph of our nobler common human spirit over our narrow communal selfishness and specially over our primal, atavistic, brute instincts of race and class is the price of our survival as one nation and free people in 1984 and thereafter.

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