

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE FUTURE
OF DEMOCRACY IN SRI LANKA

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I was in Colombo on 26 July 1983 when the usual announcement by Air Lanka, the country's only airline, put out its blurb, "Visit Sri Lanka: A Taste of Paradise". This advertisement, with pictures of the brand new hotels with expanses of beach and ocean and tables overflowing with lobster and tropical fruit, routinely appears on national television, except that on this occasion the advertisement was not quite in good taste: the paradise isle was in flames, the houses and business establishments of the minority Tamil community were being systematically burnt and looted by well-organized mobs belonging largely to the lumpenproletariat of the cities and small towns of Sri Lanka. The brutality was unbelievable: homes and shops were burnt, cars were doused with gasoline and lit, sometimes, with the occupant inside; some people were hacked to death, others burnt alive. Thirty-five political prisoners were killed by irate regulars in the country's maximum security prison. The next day seventeen more were slaughtered in the same manner. There was a total breakdown of law and order in the nation that had been praised by foreign governments as the model of stability, the apogee of free enterprise. A few days and the illusion was shattered: the house of cards had crumbled.

The antagonism between Tamils and Sinhalese is rooted in the country's history but has been exacerbated into inter-ethnic violence only since 1956. Sporadic riots, characterized by extreme brutality, occurred periodically, but what was striking about the present events was their scale which was beyond anything that had ever occurred before, and the fact that the marauders were not uncontrolled mobs on the rampage (this occurred later) but, at least on the first day (25 July), they were well-organized groups who had electoral lists of Tamil houses and enterprises and systematically went about destroying them. It is this aspect of the problem - the political organization of violence - that I shall deal with in this article. Violence had been practiced by both sides but, prior to this, the systematic organization of violence was characteristic only of the Tamil extremists (terrorists) of the North and they for the most part targeted their attacks on police and military personnel and occasionally on Tamil politicians who supported the government of President J. R. Jayawardene.

When violent acts were committed, the brutality on both sides was extreme. Tamil terrorists who killed service personnel were not content with killing *per se* but indulged also in disfiguring the bodies and desecrating corpses. This time, however, the Sinhalese outdid all others in the scale and brutality of their violence. Like the Tamil terrorists of the North, their violence too was organized; it had a planned, systematic character. This political organization of violence, I believe, goes beyond the problem of Tamil-Sinhalese ethnic conflicts and has larger political implications for the future of democracy in the island.

What, then, is the background to this violence, unprecedented in the recent history of a country designated by the people themselves as *dhamma dipa*, "the land of the Buddha's dharma", a doctrine of nonviolence and compassion? I am a Sinhalese and a Buddhist and this is the troubling question that I ask myself. To even attempt an answer one must focus first on the issue of the erosion of the law and the institutions of justice and with it the political institutionalization of violence in Sri Lanka.

I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE COMMUNAL CONFLICT

The Sinhalese speakers constitute 70 percent of the population of Sri Lanka while the Tamils are about 20 percent. The Muslims who speak Tamil but consider themselves a group apart are 7 percent. The overwhelming majority of the Sinhalese are Buddhists and the Tamils are Hindu. The Sinhalese population speak an Indo-European language (Sinhala) while the Tamils speak a Dravidian one. Underlying language and religious differences - Buddhist versus Hindu - are strong cultural and racial similarities. Physically the two groups cannot be differentiated. Though the initial Sinhala migrants were probably Indo-European language speakers who arrived over 2500 years ago, practically all later arrivals were South Indians (mostly Tamil speakers) who were assimilated into the Sinhalese Buddhist community. The South Indian influence is omnipresent among Buddhists. On a level of popular religiosity Buddhists propitiate Hindu gods like Vishnu, and Skanda, the son of Shiva. However the Buddhists view these gods as totally subservient to the Buddha while the Tamils view the Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu. Kinship and marriage patterns among the Sinhalese are also part of a larger Dravidian pattern. It is these cultural and sub-doctrinal similarities that permitted the assimilation of South Indians through long periods of historical time, into the Sinhalese Buddhist social structure.

The core of the Sinhala identity was Buddhist: the destiny of the ethnic group and that of the religion were inseparable. Myths and historical events confirmed the twin facets of this identity. Historically, almost all the invasions of Sri Lanka came from South Indian kingdoms. Thus opposing the Sinhala Buddhist identity was that of the Tamil Hindu identity. In times of historical stress

these identities were reaffirmed to mobilize popular support.

When the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505 there were several contending kingdoms in the country among whom was a Tamil Hindu kingdom in Jaffna, the northern peninsula of the island. Each of these kingdoms claimed sovereignty over the whole island. No king was content to see himself as ruler of a part since the island was always considered a totality. The call for a separate state of Tamil-speaking peoples is thus a contemporary historical phenomenon. Insofar as it is the current reality, we must inquire how it came about.

The Tamil kingdom of Jaffna had ceased to be an independent unit in the sixteenth century when it was captured by the Portuguese and then by the Dutch. The Sinhala-Buddhist kingdom in the interior of the island remained independent till 1815 when it was taken by the British. The Tamils of the East Coast and parts of the north central province traditionally owed suzerainty to the Sinhalese kings of Kandy and trade routes connected the east coast with the kingdom of Kandy. Sinhalese Tamil intermarriage, exceptional in the North, was accepted and practiced in the East Coast until recent times. When the British took over Sri Lanka they introduced yet another complexity. They brought in large numbers of South Indian tribal and often low status groups as coolie labour on the tea plantations of the central highlands. Thus there were three Tamil-Hindu zones well established by the end of the nineteenth century: in the north, in the east and in the central highlands. Though outsiders (as well as some Sinhalese) see the Tamil problem as one, the internal reality is very different. The northern Tamils were much more orthodox Hindu than Tamils elsewhere and were strongly patrilineal; the East Coast Tamils came from Kerala and were divided into matrilineal clans; while the Tamils of the central provinces were recently introduced groups from South India, alienated from the other two groups. Besides they were thrust into the midst of a surrounding Sinhalese population to whom they were also alien.

During the early twentieth century when constitutional agitation against British rule gathered momentum, Sinhalese and Tamils however presented a united position. In 1919 the Ceylon National Congress was founded by both Tamils and Sinhalese. But political parties soon began to gravitate along communal lines. The Sinhalese increasingly felt threatened by Tamil control of business and the professions while the Tamils became increasingly self-conscious of their minority identity. The political democratization of the state exacerbated these tendencies. Universal adult suffrage was introduced in the 1931 elections and this mobilized communal issues into public voting patterns. When Independence was declared in 1948 there were several Tamil political parties with an exclusively ethnic base, while Sinhalese parties though formally nonethnic, were in reality committed to Sinhalese nationalism. A further escalation of the problems of Sinhalese and Tamils occurred in the post-1956 period which saw the massive electoral success of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) over the United National Party (UNP). Much of Bandaranaike's success depended on the slogan "Sinhala Only": there was to be

one language for the nation - the language of the majority - Sinhala. This polarized the Sinhala and Tamil forces and led to Tamil demands; some for equality of status for both languages and other for a federal type of constitution.

The Tamil Federal Party, founded in 1951 accelerated the Tamil demand for autonomy. The Sinhalese on their part feared that a Tamil separatist movement would involve South Indian support and undermine the integrity of the state. In the seventies, economic hardship and unemployment and the rise of discontented youth groups added fuel to the movement. A Sinhala youth-based insurrection in 1971 was drastically quelled by the government of Mrs. Bandaranaike (SLFP). In the Tamil North, similar bands of youth militants demanded an independent Tamil state. As a result of their pressure the constitutional Tamil Federal Party changed its name and manifesto. They became the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) committed to an independent Tamil state that is to comprise of large areas of the north, east and central parts of the island. This in turn fanned Sinhala fears which increased further when Tamil youth groups, in the late seventies, supported by expatriate financial backing, adopted terrorism to achieve their goal. Terrorism in turn forced the government to send an ill-disciplined and poorly trained army into Jaffna, further exacerbating the patterns of violence and reprisals on both sides.

II. THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT

It is against the backdrop of this complicated situation that one must understand the importance of the religious revivals of the late nineteenth century and their impact on Tamil and Sinhala identities. Briefly stated, the trauma of imperial conquest and the disestablishment of the two major religions produced in the north a Tamil-Hindu revival movement headed by Arumugam Navalar and in the south a Sinhala-Buddhist revival headed by Anagarika Dharmapala. Both reformers were educated in Protestant Mission schools and brought a kind of "this-worldly ascetism" (very much like the Protestant ethic) into Hinduism and Buddhism. Both rationalized their respective religions, scorned folk beliefs and rituals, affirmed their respective great traditions. Navalar gave contemporary Hinduism a philosophical base in Saiva Siddantha while Dharmapala affirmed the ascetic and abstract values of doctrinal Buddhism largely influenced by Western commentators on Buddhism. Both provided a philosophy and an ethic for classes that had practically no historical parallel in the past - a bourgeoisie and a proletariat that emerged in the colonial and postcolonial periods. Dharmapala not only affirmed the traditional identity but opposed it to other identities - Moslem, Hindu, Christian.

The victory of Bandaranaike in 1956 was spearheaded by those who were directly or indirectly influenced by Dharmapala. Thus the post-1956 era saw the introduction of a new fundamentalist and militant Buddhism advocating the

takeover of denominational schools to reduce the power of the Christian missions; the compulsory teaching of religion in schools; the propagation of the intellectualist view of Buddhism as not a religion but a philosophy consonant with the spirit of science; and above all using Buddhism for political purposes. As a result, in our time, Buddhism had become the effective political and civil religion of the state.

In popular as well as doctrinal Buddhism, the Buddha was not a conventional deity that could either grant favours or affect the movement of history. He had achieved nirvana, the state of final bliss and consequently had no intercessionary role in the affairs of the world. The internalization of this figure in the socialization of children was radically different from that of monotheistic religions or Hinduism where the deity is an active figure and punishes and rewards the transgression of religious morals. In traditional society, as also nowadays, people worshipped the Buddha as the embodiment of Buddhist values but demanded nothing from him and expected nothing. Abstract Buddhist values such as *karuna* (universal kindness), *metta* (compassion), *mudita* (tenderness), etc., and the complex Buddhist philosophy (such as the theory of dependent origination) were never inculcated as abstractions. Abstract Buddhist ideas were concretized through the Buddha legend and the *Jataka* tales in which the past of the Buddha, his exemplary life, his self-sacrifice, his compassion for others, etc., were related. The values embodied in these tales were disseminated in various ways: through sermons, religious gatherings at temples and through popular books. Villages also staged many ritual dramas where these themes were enacted or sung; the opposed values of greed and hatred were embodied in demonic figures of evil, also as part of folk beliefs and rituals.

Thus what I have called the Buddhist identity - the idea that Sinhalese equals Buddhist and that the nation is a Buddhist one - was tempered by a Buddhist conscience which concretized the abstract values of the doctrinal tradition and gave a Buddhist humanism to traditional culture. With the reforms of the nineteenth century, Buddhist folk traditions were rejected by the Sinhala bourgeoisie. The *Jataka* tales were underplayed or rationalized. The emphasis shifted to the abstractions of the textual traditions highlighted by Western scholars. Buddhism was a compulsory school subject and parents left the onus of teaching Buddhist values to the school curriculum. The socialization of the conscience, to be effective, must start in infancy and early childhood. This is rarely done nowadays. As for the ritual dramas they are nonexistent in urban society and are dying even in the villages. An absence or gap thus exists in the Buddhist conscience. People attempt to fill this gap in a variety of ways, through the inculcation of bourgeois moral values imparted through a secular idiom or through meditation. But what happens with a lumpenproletariat in a city like that of Colombo, where 50 percent of the people live in crowded slums and only 25 percent of its children go to school? The gap must surely be wide. To continue the metaphor, the empty space in the Buddhist conscience is then filled with the predominant identity, Sinhalese equals Buddhist, reinforced by

the hatreds and frustrations that slum dwelling breeds everywhere.

III. THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

One of the fascinating problems of population growth in Sri Lanka is the relative absence of huge cities on the scale of other Asian nations (excluding Burma). People seemed to prefer to migrate into villages, and up to the forties this was the dominant pattern. Through time, however, this had an unfortunate effect in destroying the homogeneous kin-based nature of village society, and producing a variety of social groups in village life competing for scarce resources. The spillover from increasingly large and heterogeneous villages centred in the little market towns scattered all over Sri Lanka, and of course in Colombo, the one large city in the nation. The trade in these market towns is controlled by Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim merchants. Racial violence was often sparked by business competition. Merchants employ the dispossessed proletarians of these towns to eliminate business rivals specially during periods of violence after elections. In addition to these anomic market towns colonization schemes where surplus villagers were siphoned off to new irrigation projects generally in the north central and southern dry zones became increasingly important after independence (1948). The recruitment to the colonization schemes took place from crowded village areas. Settlers were often chosen by local members of Parliament, from party supporters. As a result settlements, not communities, were created. Often, in more recent projects, total outsiders have come in and taken over the political control of colonies. In addition, outsiders from the city of Colombo and its suburbs have begun to infiltrate old villages as small-time merchants and entrepreneurs. Practically all civil disturbances - postelection riots endemic after the sixties, and race riots - have occurred primarily in these lumpen colonization schemes, in the anomic market towns and in the city of Colombo. These civil disturbances have never been a village problem - though it will soon become one as the villages change their character.

One of the features of the politics of Sri Lanka since the sixties is the use made by politicians of all parties, of these dissatisfied urban people. Nowadays it is routine to use them to intimidate opponents or voters. Since the sixties it has been commonplace for ordinary citizens to use phrases like "so-and-so's (politician's) thugs". Furthermore, increasingly disturbing trends have occurred in the use of these elements for political "thuggery" (as it is called in Sri Lanka). These are not my inventions: they have been widely reported in the local press.

1. Thugs who are at the service of politicians in power are linked on the local level to merchants, some of them genuine businessmen but others involved in a variety of illegal activities, the most common of which are kassipu (moonshine) distillation, marijuana cultivation and distribution, and felling of timber

from forest reserves. In recent visits to villages in Sri Lanka I have come across members of Parliament serving remote areas actively involved in these activities, especially the latter two.

2. Police who oppose these activities or prosecute these people can be, and often are, transferred out of the area or cowed into acquiescence of illegal activity. Several newspaper editorials over the last few years have underscored this trend. The result has been the demoralization and corruption of the police force. Village people I interviewed in many parts of the nation often mentioned that the police are in the hands of the local M.P. or local undesirable. The view is widespread that some of the institutions of justice have become an alienating force turned against the people themselves.

The most disturbing trend in the institutionalization of violence occurred in the massive election victory of the UNP (the present ruling party) in 1977, in its relations with the trade union known as the Jatika Sevaka Sangamaya (National Workers Organization), hereafter referred to as J.S.S.

Prior to the election of the present government in 1977, the J.S.S. was a miniscule working-class trade union (most unions being controlled by the Marxist parties of Sri Lanka). Today the J.S.S. is the single largest trade union in the country and has an effective say in the working of government offices and corporations. Its president is Cyril Matthew, the Minister of Industries, whose name has been explicitly mentioned by several foreign correspondents as an inveterate enemy of the Tamil minority.

How did the J.S.S. come into prominence? The answer is simple but one that has frightening implications. Traditionally the leftist unions provided a Trotskyite or Marxist ideology for the working classes. Whatever one may think of these ideologies they had the effect of filling the empty space in the conscience of people with a specifically working-class ideology. With the massive election victory of the UNP the J.S.S. came into prominence. Several political leaders emerged who had access to, and control over, the slums and anomic areas of the city, prominent among them being Mr. Premadasa, the Prime Minister and Minister for Housing, whose power base was Central Colombo (once the power base of the Communist Party leader), one of the most crowded areas in the city; and Mr. M.H. Mohammed, Minister of Transport, who was the Parliamentary member for Borella (which also contains one of the largest slums in the city). With the expansion of the economy produced by the free enterprise policy of the government, jobs in the working-class sector were increasingly given to members of this lumpenproletariat who swelled the ranks of the J.S.S. Soon members of other unions were intimidated and forced to join it. The J.S.S. was without a working-class ideology; its leadership owed personal allegiances to party bosses. It is in a sense an exaggerated version of what I noted in the smaller markets towns where culturally dispossessed people serve as small bands of thugs for local merchants and politicians. However, before 1977 these bands of thugs served their masters but had no institutionalized authority. The J.S.S. changed this. They were organized and now effectively controlled government offices and corporations and

wielded enough power to transfer and intimidate even high officials unpopular with them. Furthermore, the J.S.S. was provided with an ideology, the Sinhala-Buddhist political ideology. The precarious identity of marginal people was thus given a new reality and meaning: a political and nationalist ideology. The nature of this ideology was spelled out by their president, Matthew, in a speech in Parliament on August 4, soon after the recent riots.

Matthew's thesis was that we should adopt the Malaysian example as set out by Mahathir Bin Mohammed in his book, *The Malay Dilemma*. In this book Mahathir states, says Matthew, that while the Malays are for a free enterprise system, they should not allow other racial groups to compete with Malays. Consequently, protection must be initially afforded the Malay community. Furthermore, Islam should be upheld and propagated. Malays have no place else to go whereas the Chinese can go to China and the Indians to India. The Malays are the original or indigenous people of Malaya and the only people who can claim Malaya as their one and only country. In accordance with the practice all over the world (sic), this confers on the Malays certain inalienable rights over the forms and obligations of citizenship which can be imposed on citizens of non-indigenous origin.

This dubious thesis can be applied, says Matthew, even better to the Sri Lankan situation. Malaya has 53 percent Malays and 35 percent Chinese, Sri Lanka has 74 percent Sinhalese and 17 percent Tamils. In spite of this disproportion, Tamils dominate every aspect of professional and economic life. You do not have to go to Madras, he says, come to Colombo and you'll see the Pettah dominated by South Indians - no longer, since Pettah was burnt down. The Sinhalese also have nowhere to go, but Tamils can go to India. The Sinhalese have been extraordinarily patient. In Malaya, there was a political rally by Chinese in May 1969 when they jeered at Malay policemen. The Malay government squashed it "killing all the Chinese who were there". We however, says Matthew, have been patient for ten years and now "what had happened there has occurred in Sri Lanka also". Earlier in his speech Matthew quoted from another speech he made in Parliament: "By non-violent methods or violent ones the Sinhale people are ready" to prevent the division of the country. (The summary of Matthew's speech and preceding quotes are from Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, August 4, 1983, pp. 1308-1324.)

Such an ideology has a great deal of appeal to the Sinhalese, but it is also fostered by the Tamil elite who self-consciously identify with the Tamils of South India. The Sinhalese identity nowadays is predicated on the view that since they speak an Indo-European language, they are of North Indian origin whereas the Dravidian-speaking Tamils are from the South. The historical reality however is totally different. Except perhaps for the oldest stratum of settlers prior to 500 B.C., almost all subsequent settlers in Sri Lanka came from South India, mostly from Tamil Nadu, Orissa, and Kerala and quickly became Sinhalized. In fact, some of the most vociferously anti-Tamil castes among the Sinhalese were post-fifteenth-century migrants from South India. By contrast, the Tamils of Jaffna and the East Coast have been in Sri Lanka

from at least the tenth to the fourteenth centuries A.D., if not earlier. They also came from diverse parts of South India though the Jaffna (Northern) Tamils now claim that they came from Tamil Nadu. As I stated earlier the only group of recent Tamil immigrants are the estate populations of the hill country brought over by the British in the middle and late nineteenth century. Both sides share antagonistic myths that are opposed to historical reality and like human beings everywhere act in terms of the former - with tragic consequences.

Matthew's ideology is doubtlessly shared by a vast number of Sinhalese, but the J.S.S. has given it an unprecedented militancy. Moreover, the union has spread its tentacles into other areas of the country. Thus today, the members of Parliament have created through the J.S.S., and through other local groups in small market towns, a complex, powerful series of organizations that can be put to political use. At the same time there has occurred a remarkable change in the composition of political power brokers in the country, even in village areas. Traditionally the vote, and especially the village vote, was delivered or controlled by an educated village elite, coming generally from "respectable" families. This was true of all parties but especially the UNP, the country's most important conservative party. Today this had changed or is fast changing; political power on the village level is in the hands of those who can control the unemployed and the discontented, primarily the youth.

It is against this context that one must examine specific examples of political violence in recent times. A large number of these events have been documented by the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) of Sri Lanka whose chairman is a highly regarded Anglican bishop, the Rt. Rev. Lakshman Wickramasingha. Here are a few of these cases from the CRM files and my own notes.

1. A series of violent acts occurred in Jaffna at the end of May and early June 1981, of which the most serious was the burning of the Public Library by thugs from outside while the security forces did nothing to stop the arson. The burning of the Public Library was a profoundly symbolic act: the library contained priceless manuscripts pertaining to the identity of the Tamils of Jaffna. On the Buddhist side it was an unparalleled act of barbarism, since rarely in Sri Lanka's recorded history (and perhaps even in the larger history of Buddhism) was there an example of book burning of this magnitude. The people of Jaffna identified the outsiders as the thugs of a prominent cabinet minister. The rumor in the Sinhalese areas was the same. Yet no action was taken by the President. Next year, the action was repeated in certain areas of the Sabaragamuwa Province where Tamil shops were destroyed and the homes of Tamil plantation workers pillaged. Again no action was taken by the President against the government political leaders involved in this affair.

2. A second event pertained to a gathering of artists and writers protesting their being refused work at the government-owned Broadcasting Corporation. A gang of thugs brandishing clubs and knives broke up this meeting, tore up the microphones, and chased away the participants. They shouted, "What kind of artists are you! We are Premadasa's boys". It is of course not likely that Prime Minister Premadasa had any hand in this matter but the thugs

chose to make the claim. Even more disconcerting was a disruption of a meeting of a Sinhalese-Buddhist, middle-class organization, where Ediriweera Sarachchandra, Sri Lanka's best-known dramatist, was beaten up. Sarachchandra had written a satirical book called *Dharmishta Samajaya* (A Just Society) where he highlighted the decay of cultural values brought about by the social and economic policies of the government. The thugs came in buses belonging to the state-owned bus corporation, and the Communist party paper even carried the license numbers of the buses. Sarachchandra himself made a complaint to the police. As in previous cases no police action was taken.

The following are a few examples from thirty-five cases of intimidation and assault documented by the Civil Rights Movement in a publication of October 12, 1981:

3. On July 4, 1980, teachers at Maharagama Teachers Training College were picketing peacefully when a Government Transport Board bus No. 23 Sri 2549 came through the college gates, carrying twenty-seven people including a leader of the J.S.S. Thugs got out and began to assault the teacher trainees with rubber belts, stones, bicycle chains, etc. Women were thrown to the ground and waste oil was poured over their clothes and into their eyes and ears. They attempted to run over one girl with the bus. Police arrived about 4:00 p.m. and took a statement. Two hours later people were taken to Colombo South Hospital. Four female teachers were seriously injured.

4. On June 15, 1978, 9:30 a.m., about 400 thugs, members of the J.S.S., threatened six section heads at the Thuhiriya Textile Mills and drove them off the premises. They were forced to resign. The management was warned by the thugs not to allow the six people back. It appeared that only J.S.S. members and those who accepted their terms were allowed to stay in the Mills.

5. On January 3, 1980, the Personnel Manager of the People's Bank was abused and assaulted in his office by J.S.S. officers, in the presence of several members of staff. The police were informed and the four assailants were arrested. However, they were shortly released on minimal bail of R. 250/= each. The next day, a J.S.S. official threatened certain staff members near the entrance to the Head Office over this matter.

The management suspended four people from their jobs as a result of this incident. On September 1, 1980, a J.S.S. mob roamed the building, abusing and threatening officers. Eventually, the police were sent for and the department staff was put under a police guard. The mob then looted the canteen.

On November 1, 1980, the interdicted J.S.S. members were reinstated as a result of pressure exerted on the Personnel Manager to withdraw his complaint. He was later transferred.

The pattern in these activities documented by CRM is clear: the gangs were organized, they came in government vehicles, they were sometimes accompanied by M.P.s and for the most part they belonged to the J.S.S., the trade union arm of the government in power. This almost certainly accounts for police inaction. These activities received little public comment in the press largely owing to the fact that the newspapers were either directly owned by

the government such as the Lake House group of newspapers, or supported by it. The exception was *Attha*, the Sinhalese newspaper of the Communist party, but its circulation was limited and its offices closed and sealed by the government for various periods of time.

The greatest shock to public opinion, however, occurred as a result of two recent events whereby Supreme Court decisions seemed to have been openly flouted by the government. In a public meeting held in 1982 by an inter-religious organization, a police officer seized leaflets that were being distributed. A Buddhist clergyman filed suit against the police officer. The court held that the police officer had violated the fundamental rights of the petitioner and decreed that damages and costs be directly paid by him. The cabinet, however, promoted this police officer and ordered that the costs and damages be paid out of public funds. This was done, the government stated, so that "public officers should do their jobs without fear of consequences from adverse court decisions".

The second event followed a similar pattern but received full publicity in all newspapers and outraged the middle-class conscience, which was until now generally favourable to a government that supported their class interests. In this case a senior left politician, Mrs. Vivienne Gunawardene, complained of assault and unlawful arrest by the police during a march to the American embassy in Colombo to protest against the nuclearization of the military base at Diego Garcia. The Supreme Court presided over by three judges held that her arrest was unlawful and unconstitutional and ordered that the state pay her compensation. On the very day the judgement was issued, the Cabinet presided over by the President promoted one police officer involved in the case. A few days later practically all newspapers headlined the sensational news that thugs in government-owned buses paraded outside the homes of the three judges and shouted obscenities at them. The police were conveniently not available when the judges tried to contact them. I was present in Sri Lanka at this time and it was commonplace for people gathered in bus stops and other public places to speculate whether it was X Minister's thugs or Y Minister's thugs that did it. Prime Minister Premadasa, however, made a strong statement saying that the government took a very serious view of the matter and that "appropriate action will be taken in consultation with the Attorney-General". Thus far nothing has come out of the police inquiries. It should be remembered however that this open scoffing at the judgement of the Supreme Court on these two occasions is part of a long conflict between the government and judiciary which commenced under the previous government of Mrs. Bandaranaike, particularly during the period 1970-1977. The present government with its political slogan of a "Just Society" promised to rectify these abuses, but in the last few years the rift between the executive and the judiciary seems again to have widened.

Virtually every Tamil I met was of the opinion that the violence against them was organized by the government, and especially by the J.S.S. and the influential politicians who controlled this union. Given the pattern of political intimidation and their extreme nationalist ideology, the view has considerable plausibility.

One of the most shameful events was the refusal of the minor staff of several hospitals to tend or care for the wounded. I know of an upper-class Tamil woman who broke her leg jumping from a balcony as her house was burning. She was removed to a hospital, but it refused to accept her because the minor staff (orderlies and labourers) threatened to strike if she was admitted. I know of another instance where a Tamil was actually stabbed to death in a hospital bed, allegedly by a minor employee. It is significant that the hospital system is almost totally controlled by the J.S.S. trade union. Indeed, five months earlier the Government Medical Officers Association complained of indiscipline in the hospital system and appealed to the government to protect the medical profession from union thugs. In an editorial of January 4, 1983, the government-owned newspaper, *The Daily News*, commented on the situation thus:

"The issue brings into focus again the part of trade unions in the medical profession, no matter at what level. . . . Union leaders, no matter where, must not be encouraged to get away through some show of force. . . ."

Sadly, the Government Medical Officers Associations is not the only organization that has protested against the extension of political patronage to hoodlums. Sadly, there is nothing new in this malady. Sadly enough, it is to be seen in other state-controlled organizations where again the management apparently lacks the strength to enforce discipline on favoured sections or individuals on their staff.

One thing is clear enough. No state, no government, no party that condemns Naxalite (leftist terrorist groups that operate in Bengal) methods can condone equally outrageous behavior in any institution under its control.

It is futile to denounce thuggery on the one hand and resort to it or let it go unpunished on the other. . . ."

IV. THE REFERENDUM AND THE ABOLITION OF ELECTIONS

Such political organization of violence can herald the demise of what has been so far one of the few democracies in the non-Western world. The present government, the United National Party, came into power with a landslide majority in 1977 defeating Mrs. Bandaranaike's SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party). The SLFP did not have enough representation even to choose the leadership of the opposition; this went to Mr. Amirthalingam, the leader of the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front), the Constitutionalist group representing the Tamil minority. The government started with a great deal of public goodwill and confidence in the leadership of Mr. J. R. Jayawardene. He initiated his regime with two major policy decisions that changed the economic and political face of the country. Firstly, he rejected the narrow and crude socialism of the SLFP and adopted an "open economy" encouraging

foreign investment, by opening a free trade zone in the north of Colombo. The second was a political change initiated in 1978. He used his five-sixths majority to change the "Westminster-type" parliamentary system that prevailed until then, into a "Gaullist-type" system based on proportional representation (PR). This was initially done by simply amending the constitution, making himself President and converting the current elected representatives into the representatives of the new system. The PR system was welcomed by most civil rights groups in the country, though some features of the system were disturbing. One of these was that if a member of Parliament resigned or was expelled from the Party, the President could nominate someone to take his place and thus by-pass the need for by-elections.

On October 20, 1982, the first Presidential election was held under the new constitution and Mr. Jayawardene was elected President with 52 percent of the votes polled. A general election based on PR under the new constitution was expected to follow. But this in fact did not happen. In a press conference Mr. Jayawardene said that the very day after the Presidential election he had heard from the Police Department of a "Naxalite Plot" from within the SLFP "to assassinate me and four other ministers, as well as Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, Armed Forces chiefs and others; do away with the Constitution; imprison Mrs-Bandaranaike". In order to prevent this he was not going to have a general election. "If I dissolved Parliament and held the general election, according to the 20 October voting (i.e., according to the Presidential election) my party, The United National Party, would have obtained 120 seats out of 196. The SLFP would have obtained 68 seats. I don't mind that but I do mind if the opposition is an anti-democratic, violent and Naxalite (anarchist) opposition." He continued: "I decided to change my mind and call for a Referendum and not a general election for this reason and this reason alone."

Thus the abolition of the general elections was done ostensibly for altruistic reasons. But effectively it meant that the government could by a Referendum requiring a simple majority perpetuate the Parliamentary majority of five-sixths held under the previous (Westminster-type) constitution! The whole point of changing the constitution to a system of proportional representation was deliberately undermined. It is more likely that the real reason for the change was the fear that if the SLFP obtained 68 seats, the government would not have the two-thirds majority it required to continue the pattern of successive amendments to the constitution such as it had introduced. It would also create an effective opposition that might be critical of the executive Presidency. It was thus decided to hold a Referendum, but prior to this the President asked all Parliament members of his party to submit undated letters of resignation. Again the rationale was supposedly altruistic: to eliminate bad or corrupt MPs and nominate others instead. But once again in effect it meant that the President now had a stranglehold on his MPs and could dismiss and replace them with members of his choice. The effect of the Referendum which Mr. Jayawardene won with only 51 percent of the votes polled was to strengthen the executive Presidency by eliminating criticism from both the opposition

which now hardly existed, and from his own MPs, who had signed undated letters of resignation. For example, the Minister of Finance who was unpopular in his constituency in the South resigned from that seat and he was reassigned to another constituency over the protest of Party members of that area. More recently, a Party member who helped organize the Referendum vote in two key areas was given a Parliamentary seat when a recent "vacancy" occurred. These persons had no public mandate to represent any of these constituencies. Thus it is possible to produce in time a group of Parliamentary representatives who do not represent the people but only the President. The effect of these changes is to produce an all-powerful Presidency and muffle criticism within the governing party. The power of the Presidency is further reinforced according to Article 35 of the constitution as interpreted by the Solicitor General. The President is immune from court proceedings and cannot be made a part in such proceedings. The President himself summed up the situation in an address to the Party at the 28th annual convention of the UNP:

"The country needs one strong individual who fears not the Judiciary, the Legislature nor the Party but only the general public to develop it and I have the power to do anything for six years" (The Island, Sunday, February 27, 1983).

The referendum saw the full mobilization of the organizations of institutionalized violence to deliver the vote. Both sides adopted violent methods, except that the UNP, as the party in power, was better organized. What was especially striking for Sri Lanka was the mass-scale impersonation of voters that occurred. In many villages I visited, people told me how they had been threatened the previous night and asked to refrain from voting. Their votes were blatantly cast by impersonators. Another striking feature was the open threats made to public officers manning polling booths. These middle-class persons were so frightened that they did not report fraudulent voting to the police. That their fears were well founded is clear from a news item which appeared in several newspapers about a Colombo politician who, along with a number of his supporters, threatened the presiding officer with a pistol, assaulted him, while his supporters carried bombs. The Island of January 6, 1983, wrote: "Mr. Anura Bastian, MP for Colombo West, denied in Parliament yesterday any implication that he was the politician concerned. It was not exactly clear why he should have done so when no names had been mentioned." It was, however, clear that the President himself believed in Mr. Bastian's innocence and political integrity, for he was promoted as the head of the newly founded Home Guards!

The key thesis of the Referendum was the proposed takeover of the SLFP by a group of anarchist terrorists (Naxalites) who, if elected, would disrupt Parliament, kill key personnel and produce a dictatorship. This was constantly repeated in election speeches by government leaders and heavily publicized in newspapers. To prevent an early takeover by violent elements, the government held the election under a state of emergency which gave police wide

powers of arrest. These arrests in fact took place and included the arrest and remand of Mrs. Bandaranaike's son-in-law (one of the Naxalites) who was also a film star and popular orator. Eight opposition parties protested the arrest and remand of twelve key SLFP organizers in different electorates in the country. They were released after the Referendum was over and they were never produced in a court of law. Posters intimidating the voters to say "Yes" appeared all over, in spite of protests by political parties and civil rights groups about this flagrant violation of election law. The Communist party newspaper was closed down so that it ceased to function at this time. Newspapers, even those supporting the government, widely reported cases of intimidation and violence. The Island, congratulating the President on his victory, underscored this: "It is a pity, however, that the Referendum had to be marred by ugly use of thugery allegedly by Government leaders which has left a bitter taste in the mouth".

The public disillusionment regarding elections was manifest in a 10 percent drop in the vote compared with the Presidential election of a few months before. Though there was a drop in the voting, some electoral districts showed disproportionate increases. This phenomenon took place in Attanagalla (Mrs. Bandaranaike's former electorate) and Dompe (formerly that of Mr. Felix Bandaranaike). Both electorates were important for the government for reasons of prestige, and a strong UNP party man was sent to organize these two areas. The ensuing violence was so great that Mrs. Bandaranaike had to withdraw her polling agents! In spite of this, the total poll fell by 4.67 percent (when compared with the Presidential poll) yet the vote for the government showed a phenomenal increase of 59 percent! In Dompe the poll fell from 84.7 percent to 74.08 percent, yet the vote for the government rose by 13 percent. An election agent of the opposition was killed here. One electorate, Matale (with many backward areas), suffered severe flood damage during the Referendum, yet 30,565 voters out of a register of 35,129 allegedly braved these disasters to vote, giving the government a 50 percent increase! The opposition view that organized violence and election fraud did in fact take place seems to be substantiated at least in some key constituencies.

What then happened to the Naxalite anarchists in the aftermath of the Referendum? Mr. Pieter Keuneman, the leader of the Communist Party, as reported in The Sun of March 3, 1983, asks: "Where are the Naxalites and why aren't they brought to book? Has one member been charged on this count? Why has it been totally forgotten? The people have been deprived of their basic right of voting." The Naxalite threat was not totally forgotten. Very recently (between July 23 and 28, 1983) the government released the CID report on this subject and it was serialized in several newspapers. Except for a lot of gossip and loose talk the deadly threat to democracy and the lives of political leaders turned out to be not so serious after all. No charges were made.

V. POLITICAL RHETORIC AND THE AFTERMATH

The racial riots started on the night of the 24th. Those of us who witnessed the situation that night felt that the government would impose an immediate curfew. I know of several senior government officials and politicians who said they telephoned the President on the seriousness of the situation, which he must surely have known anyway, since mobs demonstrated near his private residence. Yet no curfew was imposed until 2:00 p.m. the next day and by this time most of the damage to property and looting had already taken place. One thing must be clearly stated: President Jayawardene is not a racist. It is likely, therefore, that his inaction was due to bad advice he received from groups within his own party. Even more incredible is that neither the President nor any member of the government appeared on national TV or radio, exhorting the people to calm down, or condemning the violence unleashed. The President made his speech five days later with practically no compassion extended to those who suffered most - the Tamils of Colombo. The tone of the speeches of other government leaders was the same: these speeches were designed to placate the Sinhalese community - not a word of compassion for the Tamils. Mr. Lalith Atulathmudali, the young Minister of Trade, opened his speech to the nation thus: "A few days ago, my friends, I saw a sight which neither you nor I thought that we should live to see again. We saw many people looking for food, standing in line, greatly inconvenienced, seriously inconvenienced." Here was the leading intellectual in the government speaking of the hardship faced by Sinhalese people queuing up for food when 70 000 Tamils were in refugee camps! Equally astonishing is the fact that neither the President nor any Minister of the government made an official visit to a single refugee camp to console the dispossessed.

The public utterances of government leaders seemed to be carefully orchestrated. It was as if they viewed the racial violence not as a product of urban mobs but as a mass movement of Sinhalese people in general: hence possibly the refusal to extend compassion to those who actually suffered. This came out clearly in the President's own speech on July 28 where he promised to introduce legislation to ban separatism or even talk of separatism. He said furthermore that because of the violence initiated by Tamil terrorists, "the Sinhalese people themselves have reacted". Prime Minister Premadasa was even more explicit:

"We have now taken a decision to include in the Constitution that even advocating a division of the country is illegal. No one would be able to even talk about it. Such a campaign will be made illegal. We would not only deprive those advocating any division of the country of their civic rights, we would even bring legislation to confiscate their properties. Those advocating any division of the country will not be able to talk about it even in a foreign land. Because we would punish them on their return to Sri Lanka. The President yesterday promised you that such actions would be ordered

by the government. He said so to dispel any doubts that you may have had in your minds.

But see what has happened today. Today they have heard rumours that tigers (Tamil terrorists) have come to Colombo and invaded Colombo. Just imagine the great destruction and the crimes committed based on such wild rumours. Our people not only were aroused but also engaged themselves in violent acts. They have taken clubs and other weapons and engaged in violent acts. As a result even our Sinhala and Muslim brethren have been subjected to harassment."

The words "our people" appear several times. It is certainly true that the greatest destruction of property occurred in the area represented by Prime Minister Premadasa (Colombo Central) yet the "our people" in his speech does not refer to those specific elements of the city population. According to the government scenario those committing acts of violence were the generality of Sinhalese people. This is certainly not the case: most middle-class people, as well as ordinary villagers I know, have a strong Sinhala-Buddhist identity, but they did not engage in acts of violence against Tamils and were for the most part shocked by the brutality and suddenness of these events. It is true that some connived at these events, but others gave Tamil refugees shelter in their homes at great personal risk. They were not without a profound ambivalence; but this was not a mass movement of the Sinhala people against the Tamils. If this were so, one must give up any hope for the future, not just of the Tamils, who could flee to the north and east of the island or to South India, but more so for the Buddhists entrapped in their own violence. What a fate for a nation subscribing to a religion of nonviolence!

Both the Tamils hurt by these events and even Sinhala people, as well as the foreign press, openly stated that the government either condoned the attack or it was done by factions within the government. As a response to this, the government came out with its own theory of an international and local Communist conspiracy. Even nongovernment leaders made the same point. Ariyaratna, a leader of a voluntary organization called Sarvodaya, in his speech spoke of a situation created "by intrigue of both national and international origin". This time it was not a Naxalite plot, but an internationally aided Communist plot to take over the country. The President even implied the possibility that the killing of the army personnel may also have been part of the plan. According to this anti-government plot scenario the Muslims and Christians were to be massacred next. The parties who allegedly planned this overthrow of the government were proscribed, these being the JVP (the political group that spearheaded a youth insurrection in 1971), the NLSSP (a tiny Trotskyite group), and the Communist Party. Dark doings by foreign embassies were also hinted at by the local newspapers.

For once the public was skeptical of these "complots", as Richard III would have said. In the first place, all three of the proscribed parties were sympathetic with Tamil language aspirations, and two (JVP and CP) were supposedly in

cahoots with the terrorists while one (NLSSP) openly sided with the Tamil demand for a separate state. It was difficult to believe that the very groups sympathetic to the Tamils would systematically plunder, loot, and destroy Tamil homes and gruesomely murder men and women. Several Sinhalese people I met were willing to believe that these groups may have got involved later in the destruction of factories. But even here I know an owner of a factory and a manager of another who could identify the looters as members of the government trade union. Similarly it is difficult to believe that a government so promptly informed of a Naxalite plot by the CID a day after the Presidential election were ignorant of a more serious plot by Marxist groups to create race riots. In other words, the government was forewarned of a plot that did not occur but not warned of one that did! Thirdly, if the racial riots were caused by Marxists, why did the government imply that it was a popular uprising by the Sinhalese and why in heaven's name did no one offer sympathy for the dispossessed or visit refugee camps? The rhetoric of plots was obviously less for local consumption than for the Thatcher and Reagan governments whose cooperation was necessary to rebuild the economy. It is also obvious that these actions would further eliminate political opposition to the ruling party and reinforce the power of the Presidency.

VI. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE: THE POLITICAL ISSUE

Needless to say, the future for Sri Lanka is bleak. But behind the rioting is the spectre of increasing authoritarian rule. The prestigious Indian newspaper, *The Hindu*, commenting on President Jayawardene's "victory" at the Referendum stated in an editorial of December 25, 1982: "Mr. Jayawardene will be leading the country towards one-party rule with all its menacing implications - and, in the end, may have won nothing but a Pyrrhic victory". In my view the recent riots would not have occurred - at least on the same scale - if the general elections had been held, providing Parliament with a strong opposition. The very existence of an opposition creates criticism of the government and provides opportunity for public debate. The actions of the J.S.S. would have been subject to Parliamentary criticism, and so would have been the ultra-nationalism of government party leaders. The motives for such criticism might have been unprincipled political opportunism, but their effect would surely have brought about division and debate among the two major Sinhalese political parties. It is therefore sad to hear eminent Sri Lankan political scientists and intellectuals, both local and expatriate, say that Westminster-type constitutions are of little use in Third World Nations and strong presidencies are required. Surely we are dealing here with the prison house of language, where a convenient label like "Third World" is reified to designate a single social and political reality. It is also a mistake to assume that modern political institutions imported from the West have no

parallel in tradition, since forms of voting and consensual government are not alien to traditional societies. Introduced political processes can often thus be given traditional validation. Sri Lanka with its long history and tradition of Buddhist thought took readily to the concept of universal suffrage so that it had the largest voluntary voter turnout in the whole world. People understood the power of the vote and they used it to vote out practically every government in power since independence. There was also no attempt to tamper with the electoral process itself. Moreover, it was doubtful whether Sri Lanka ever had a Westminster-type government, except on paper. They had, through the long years of British rule and after, adapted the Westminster model to suit their own character and institutions. The one key institution they held in high regard was the free vote and free elections. The overthrow of this institution and the mass violence and impersonation of voters that followed have led to serious public disillusionment and demoralization to be seen and felt everywhere. People, both in villages and cities, have told me on several recent occasions, that they will not vote hereafter because it is "useless". This to me heralds the impending death of the democratic process.

The pernicious myth that it needs a strong authoritarian ruler to govern "Third World" countries is partly responsible for the present situation, providing intellectual justification for one-party rule, not just in Sri Lanka but elsewhere also. If Marcos uses his army to crush opposition, Sri Lanka (which has no army to speak of) has created a parallel institution in a government trade union that has a paramilitary function. In doing so she may well have created a model for other small nations to emulate. The impending development and expansion of "Home Guards" I fear may also have a similar effect.

All this means that one should not be deluded by words like "Westminster-type government" "Gaullist-type regime" or that charmingly innocent term "Home Guards": one has to probe the reality that lies beneath. The implications of that reality are also clear: unless the government holds a general election soon, under conditions which permit people to exercise their vote without fear and intimidation, one of the few democracies of the Third World will surely go the way of nations like the Philippines.

The erosion of political institutions has a paradoxical effect for it eventually creates a peculiar dilemma for the rulers themselves. The ruler who can no longer rely on supra-personal institutions to carry on the process of government, is forced to personalize them. Increasing personalization inevitably pushes the authoritarian ruler to balance one power group or institution against another. In doing so he gets trapped in an internal conflict that takes on a momentum of its own and undermines the very basis of his authoritarian power. This seems likely to be the fate of Sri Lanka, as it has been the fate of other Third World countries.

President Jayawardene is a man of some stature; it is possible that he may have realized that a monster has been created in recent years (perhaps unwittingly). The monster seems now to have taken on a life of its own and must be tamed or killed if democracy is to survive in Sri Lanka and the President

himself be given a niche in history.

VII. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE: THE ETHNIC ISSUE

What about the immediate issue, that of the secession movement in the North and the Sinhalese reaction to it? One thing is clear: if the intention of the thugs was to push the Tamils out of the Sinhalese areas, they have surely succeeded. Not all Tamils have roots in the north and east, so some will have to come back and settle in Colombo and elsewhere, but professionals will probably leave the country and anyone with alternatives will resort to them. If the intention was to stifle the secessionist movement, then surely the strategy has backfired. The moderates among Tamils have been virtually eliminated in this polarization of forces, and more people, especially youths, who have seen or heard of the macabre nature of the riots are now likely to join the terrorist organizations. This is a real pity for, in my view, political sovereignty on the basis of language cannot work in South Asia. This is especially so in Sri Lanka.

Underlying the language uniformity which one sees in large areas of South Asia are serious and persisting divisions on the basis of culture and social structure. In the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka these differences are especially conspicuous. We noted that there are two major sets of Tamil speakers, Hindu and Muslim. Sri Lankan Muslims do not consider themselves Tamils (in the ethnic sense) but Muslims. Prior to the language conflicts between Sinhalese and Tamils, there were endemic conflicts between Muslims and Tamil Hindus, some extremely violent, particularly on the east coast. This was to be expected given the Hindu-Muslim conflicts on the mainland. Assuming the existence of an independent Tamil state, one set of minority problems would be replaced by another. The Tamils would now be in a majority vis-à-vis the Muslims, but proportionately speaking, the Muslims would be a larger minority vis-à-vis the Tamils than the Tamils are in respect of the Sinhalese!

In addition to this there are deep subdivisions among the Tamils living in different areas of the island. The Jaffna Peninsula, where most of the political agitation takes place, is self-consciously identified with high Hinduism and a patriarchal ideology and the great tradition of Dravidian culture. By contrast the East Coast Tamils are mostly matrilineal, practice Dravidian folk religion and claim origins in Kerala. Even today there is considerable suspicion and hostility between these groups, especially the resentment by East Coast Tamils of the economic domination of northern merchants. The recent Tamils imported into the central highlands by the British are generally of low caste and remain divided from the two previous groups. These divisions between the various groups of Tamil speakers are reflected today even in the political system where the government party has three Ministers in its cabinet representing the Tamils of the East and the inland regions while Tamils of the North are represented by the TULF which is an opposition party. What the recent riots might have done

is to push people from the east and central areas into a larger Tamil movement. If so, Sinhalese extremists would have fulfilled a prophecy - not theirs but that of their opponents.

One must also mention that great divider in Hindu society - caste. The aristocratic caste of landowners or Vellala dominate the politics and economy of the north and east and constitute about 40 percent of the population. In recent years the hegemony of the Vellala has been challenged by the Karaiyar (traditionally fishermen) who have moved into professional and entrepreneurial positions. There are also other large and powerful minority castes (e.g., Koviars, Mukkuvars) who are opposed to both these castes and are not likely to welcome the perpetuation of Vellala hegemony. Finally there are untouchables and near-untouchables who are barely considered human by the rest of Hindu society and consequently were some of the first Buddhist converts in this region. Caste is compounded by another division, that of Tamil-speaking Christians of the North (5 percent) who are politically and economically powerful. A striking feature of recent politics in both Sinhalese and Tamil areas is the extreme language chauvinism of the Christians. It is as if their marginal position in Buddhist and Hindu society has forced them to overemphasize their ethnic identity. But it is equally likely that in the event of an exclusive Tamil-Hindu domination in the North, the Christians would be in an even more vulnerable position than the Muslims. The realities discussed above are reflected in the current political scene where, in spite of years of universal suffrage and democratic process, there are only two non-Vellala members of Parliament representing the Hindu-Tamil areas.

Thus, the upshot of the preceding argument is that in the eventuality of the Tamils achieving political independence (or even a form of federalism), there will arise a series of "minority problems" which will be as serious and internally more disruptive than those which prevail now between Sinhalese and Tamils. Language unity is an illusory one in Tamil Sri Lanka (as elsewhere in South Asia); the reality is internal division based on religion, caste, ethnic origins, etc. It should also be remembered that even the northern terrorist groups who are fighting to establish a separate Tamil State (Eelam) are not a single entity. They are also fractioned into smaller groups based on caste affiliations and vying for political dominance. One of the terrorist groups currently very powerful, has a Karaiyar caste leadership and power base, while the other (now operating from South India) is Vellala caste based. Indeed recently the latter has openly upbraided the Karaiyar organization for killing the thirteen Sinhalese servicemen in ambush in Jaffna and thereby triggering the massive Sinhalese reprisal and violence.

It is clear that current political realities seem to defy immediate political resolution of the inter-ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Yet it is virtually certain that only political compromise by both sides can bring about any lasting solution. To the credit of President Jayawardene it must be stated that he started this process of compromise, by introducing legislation to give greater autonomy to the Tamil regions of the country. But much of this remained on paper

since reactionary elements in his own party did not permit the implementation of government policy. On the Tamil side terrorist organizations did not brook compromise, and moderate Tamils did not speak up for fear of reprisals from terrorists. While it is likely that when the riots broke out the President was advised not to impose an immediate curfew, since some strong-arm tactics against the Tamil business community would facilitate negotiations, it is however unlikely that the President or the Prime Minister would have condoned the use of UNP unions for mass reprisals against Tamils. But an analysis of events makes it equally clear that elements within their own party forced the issue, and once urban mobs were roused, all sorts of pathological elements in the city population went on the rampage. Contrary to Tamil opinion I do not believe that the government actually organized the riots; rather it was organized for the government by forces which the government itself had created, albeit for other purposes. Perhaps the government is yet unaware that this manyheaded monster it created may not only destroy its creator but also the entire democratic fabric of Sri Lankan society.

Note: A version of this paper will appear in a book edited by James Manor on recent political trends in Sri Lanka.