

EMERGENCY '58 – THE STORY OF THE CEYLON RACE RIOTS

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Preface

The people of Ceylon have seen how the mutual respect and good will which existed between two races for several hundred years was destroyed within the relatively brief period of thirty months.

This book, most of which was written during those long, tense curfew nights of May and June 1958, is a record of the events, passions and under-currents which led to the recent communal crisis, and of the more remarkable instances of man's inhumanity to man in those hate-filled days. It is also an account of the rapid disintegration of the old-established order of social and economic relationships in so far as it contributed towards the disaster which overtook the country.

Social and economic change was perhaps inevitable and probably necessary. Unfortunately the men who had been given a popular mandate to initiate and carry out the change proved to be incapable of preventing the process from degenerating into nation-wide chaos. The new order could have been brought about without bloodshed and searing religious or communal bitterness by the firm application of the law of the land without fear or favouritism and by statesmanship which resolutely withstood the temptation to yield to the shrill dictates of expediency.

When a Government, however popular, begins to pander to racial or religious emotionalism merely because it is the loudest of the raucous demands made on it, and then meddles in the administration and enforcement of law and order for the benefit of its favourites or to win the plaudits of a crowd, however hysterical it may be, catastrophe is certain.

At the risk of losing the monumental support of the anti-Muslim Congress sympathizers, Mahatma Gandhi once said:

"No cabinet worthy of being representative of a large mass of mankind can afford to take any step merely because it is likely to win the hasty applause of an unthinking public. In the midst of insanity, should not our best representatives retain sanity and bravely prevent a wreck of the ship of state under their care?"

Can anyone doubt that if this glorious principle of statesmanship had been applied in Ceylon the bloodbath of 1958 could have been avoided?

Many Ceylonese—Sinhalese and Tamils—lost their lives in the riots of May and June. Many of them lost their children, their property, their means of livelihood and some even their reason. In Colombo, Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Batticaloa, Eravur, Kurunegala and many other places where the two communities clashed the ugly scars will remain tender long

after time has buried the physical signs of chaos. There is no sense in putting the blame on one community or the other. A race cannot be held responsible for the bestiality of some of its members. Neither is there any sense in trying to find a final answer to the question: who started it—was it the Sinhalese or the Tamils? The answer depends entirely on how far back in events you want to go—a never-ending and unrewarding pastime.

Emergency '58 ends with a question: 'Have we come to the parting of the ways?'

Many thoughtful people believe that we have. Others, more hopeful, feel that the bloodbath we have emerged from has purified the national spirit and given people a costly lesson in humility.

There is, perhaps, a more practical way to think about it. The problems of Ceylon—social, economic, political, religious and racial—are minute compared to those faced by India or Indonesia. This is a small country with a relatively tiny population. The physical difficulties of distance which confront the governments of large land masses are absent here. Ceylon is one of the few countries in the world which is not squashed economically by a heavy defence-budget.

What is lacking is responsible leadership among both communities and statesmanship at the centre of government. We now know the cost of postponing decisions and surrendering wretchedly to political expediency when problems, which often thrive on neglect, assume massive proportions. Is it not possible for a small people like us to throw away the labels which have divided us, one group from another, and work towards a national rather than a sectional ideal? There is no dearth of men who have the intelligence and the desire to work for this aim. Is it impossible to get them together?

Emergency '58 is not likely to please every reader. On the contrary, it is certain to displease many. I do not know how to write with text-book discretion about the suffering we saw around us and the terror and the hate on the faces of people we had known all our lives. Human history can never be a chronological festoon of events held together by nicely defined causes. The story of a man is the story of a succession of states like love, fear, hate, indecision, self-assurance, ecstasy, depression.

The story of the race riots of 1958 is a story of violence, unreason, anger, jealousy, fear, cynicism, vengeance and many other states of heart and mind which the people of Ceylon experienced. I have presented it like that and, therefore, I will freely admit that Emergency '58 is opinionated. But I make one claim for the book: it has been written with the old journalistic saw in mind :facts are sacred, comment is free.

Many friends helped me to write this book because they believed that the facts must be recorded. I shall not list their names, as is customary, for the very simple reason that I would prefer not to involve them unnecessarily in any official reaction which Emergency '58 may provoke.

T.V.
Colombo '58.

The Background

"what a tide of woes

Comes rushing on this woeful land at once!"Richard II

In May and June 1958, the Island of Ceylon, the peaceful tea-garden, burst into flaming headlines in the world's press. 'Seven Thousand Britons Ordered to Quit Ceylon', 'Hundreds Killed in Race-Riots', 'State of Emergency Declared', 'Dawn to Dusk Curfew Imposed', 'Northern Rebel Leaders Arrested', 'Strict Press Censorship', 'Civil Liberties Suspended', 'Tea, Rubber Piles High in Colombo Port', '12,000 Refugees Removed to Safety' proclaimed the special correspondents who had been forced by the severity of censorship to sneak out of Ceylon and file their stories with a Madras dateline.

What had happened to Ceylon—that tranquil, beautiful and profitable island, which had always been regarded in the West as a model among the newly independent countries? The people of Ceylon had seemed really to have assimilated parliamentary democracy and the nice forms and conventions that make such a system work. The ugly racialism which had followed the partition of India and the granting of independence had, mercifully, not touched the island, while the religious fanaticism which had so severely afflicted Pakistan, Burma and India seemed to have by-passed it. Ceylon's living standards were noticeably better than her neighbours', so that the spread of communism seemed a remote possibility in spite of the garrulity of the Marxists and the complexity of Left-Wing political parties there. The activities of the Communists, Trotskyists and Bolshevik Leninists who formed groups and united fronts with fervent enthusiasm only to splinter into screaming 'fractions' a few months later, were looked upon with tolerance by the Government and its friends abroad, particularly in the Commonwealth

Here was a democratic country where many races and many faiths existed side by side in tolerance and dignity. Moderation appeared to be the key-note of this right little, tight little island. No wonder that a High Commissioner for Ceylon in London once publicly boasted at a Guildhall banquet that Ceylon was a 'little bit of England'. And, superficially at any rate, it was from many points of view.

Ceylon is about half the size of England, about 25,000 square miles in extent. Her economy, like Britain's, depends principally on her export products. Tea, for which Ceylon is justifiably famous, is still largely owned and grown by the British companies who thereby produce as much as 62 per cent of the island's foreign income. Rubber and coconut produce are the other major sources of wealth. Plumbago, gems and a few other mineral products have a steady market abroad. There is no large-scale industry and very few and meagre small-scale industries to produce wealth and opportunities for employment. A huge slice of Ceylon's national income—more than a third—goes to pay the annual bill on food imports: rice, flour, dried fish, canned products, meat, fruit, lentils of various kinds and even spices. If the world markets for tea, rubber and coconut are disturbed for any reason and prices fall, Ceylon finds herself in Debtor's Street. This is the danger of a lop-sided economy, particularly when the greater part of the food requirements of the people is imported.

On this economy about 9,000,000 people subsist. There are 6,000,000 Sinhalese who originally came from Northern India and settled in Ceylon over 2,000 years ago. The Sinhalese settled mainly in what are now called the North Central, North-Western and Southern Provinces. The capitals of the most powerful Sinhalese kings were Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, which up to the present day show impressive archaeological evidence of having been centres of a magnificent civilization inspired and tempered by the ideals of Buddhism. Later, when these civilizations crumbled and the jungle tide swept over Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, the Sinhalese moved south and south-westward towards Kandy and Colombo.

For many centuries the north and eastern parts of Ceylon have been peopled mainly by another race, the Tamils. The Tamils are a people of Dravidian stock who spilled over from South India to the Jaffna Peninsula in the north and worked their way south and south-eastward, setting up a powerful kingdom. In 164 B.C. the epic battle between King Dutugemunu of the Sinhalese and King Elara of the Tamils took place. According to tradition the issue was settled by the two kings chivalrously fighting each other on elephants. Elara was killed. This battle settled the final verdict, according to Sinhalese historians, on which race was to predominate in Ceylon. Echoes of this battle of nearly 2000 years ago were to be heard on the same plains in 1958.

By the end of the sixteenth century, when Europe started taking an active commercial interest in Ceylon, the centre of gravity of the Sinhalese population had shifted south and south-westward. The Tamils concentrated in the north and the eastern maritime plains. On the fertile plains of the west which had once been so intensely cultivated by the farmer Kings of Ceylon that they could boast that 'not one drop of rain water would reach the sea without having grown one grain of rice', the equatorial forest now grew dense and forbidding. Cities, temples, palaces, massive irrigation works were trampled into the ground by the giant trees.

This gradual process produced many results, one of the most significant being the actual physical isolation of the two main racial groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamil peasantry. The peasantry makes up the vast majority of the population of Ceylon. This separation exists up to the present day and has been, as we shall see, largely responsible for the fact that for several hundred years, the Sinhalese and the Tamils have been able to live peaceably without recourse to the internecine warfare which had impoverished the ancient kingdoms of the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

But the forest and the scrub which acted as an insulating agent between the two races are being stripped once again under the force of 'progress'. Bulldozers, tractors and technicians from the Colombo Plan and various other international agencies are helping the Ceylon Government to clear the jungle and make the plains fertile and populous once again. It is a strange quirk of destiny and an illuminating instance of the peculiar polarity of every process, that the recapture of the land from waste, and its resettlement, has also brought about a recrudescence of the economic competitiveness and bitterness which caused the inter-racial wars in ancient Ceylon.

There is, of course, more to it than that. The physical separation that existed between the peasantry was not evident in the middle classes. For many scores of years the biggest 'industry' in Ceylon has been the public service. The dearest wish of almost every parent is that their sons should find employment in the civil service or the clerical service, or in one of the Government's technical departments. The Tamils particularly, who in the south were not

blessed by fertility of soil, always regarded a job in the government service as a kind of sinecure qua non. Sons in the public service, with pension rights and other 'perks' to their credit, fetched good prices in the dowry market.

All went smoothly as long as the public services and, as a spillover, the mercantile services, were expanding fast enough to absorb the growing educated population. But by the end of World War Two the public services had reached saturation point. Since 1948, ten years of independence have not produced the industrial and agricultural expansion which was essential to increase wealth and maintain employment levels. The inevitable result has been the creation of a large articulate class of educated, semi-educated and disgruntled young men and women who, as might be expected, are easy prey to the strident seductiveness of racialism, hyper-nationalism or communism. The easiest explanation offered for their inability to find employment or gain promotion in the public service was that the Tamils were deliberately and cunningly packing the services with their own kind.

In an economy which is expanding people have no time, desire nor motive for race-hate, class-hate or religious hate. It is only when a country's economy is on the down—grade that the inner stresses of society begin to make themselves felt. Group relationships begin to break up inexorably when the economy is unable to sustain the pressure of population and insecurity haunts the people. It is also an observable fact that politicians will try to exploit this situation, particularly when they have no foreign political interests of any magnitude with which to distract the people's attention from domestic problems.

Ever since the grant of independence in 1948, there has been in Ceylon a tremendous churning up of emotionalism—the chief feature being fear of insecurity. Beside the 6,000,000 Sinhalese and the 1,000,000 indigenous Tamils referred to already, there are 1,000,000 South Indian Tamil immigrant labourers who were brought over by the British for cheap labour on the estates.

Their existence in Ceylon was the subject of constant reproach against the Government by the growing population in the hill country, a group which is loosely referred to as the 'Kandyans'. The first Prime Minister of Ceylon, D. S. Senanayake, put an end to the open influx of South Indian labour by enacting the Ceylon Citizenship Act which defined the qualifications for citizenship in Ceylon. Although this Act was specifically intended to limit Indian immigration it had the effect of excluding British and all other foreign people in Ceylon from citizenship rights and privileges, with the result that even Britons with long-established business interests in Ceylon have to secure temporary residence permits to stay in the island even for a brief period.

The fear of being evicted from their relatively comfortable billets on the tea estates hammered the Indian Tamils into powerful organizations which could paralyse the entire tea trade at will. The fear of unemployment for themselves and their children impelled the Kandyan peasantry to demand the expulsion of the Indians. The fear that this Tamil-speaking group of 1,000,000 indigenous Tamils and 1,000,000 Indian Tamils would join together and form a really formidable minority caused the Sinhalese politicians considerable anxiety. Every community in Ceylon was affected by this fear of insecurity.

The Ceylon Moors, numbering over half a million—mainly traders and businessmen—were afraid of being lumped together with the Tamil minorities, particularly because many of them had adopted Tamil as their mother tongue.

The Burghers too—a group of about 45,000 descendants of the Portuguese and Dutch regimes in Ceylon, most of whom had identified their interests with those of the British and had adopted the Western modes of living, even to the extent of regarding English as their mother tongue—reacted quickly to this feeling of insecurity. Many of them could not contemplate a future under different standards from those to which they were accustomed, and the fear that their children would have to live under disadvantages due to their fair colour or their relative unfamiliarity with the Sinhalese language and traditions, drove them away to Australia, Canada or Britain as immigrants.

The British residents, planters and merchants, who just after Independence numbered around 7,000, had soon got over their initial panic and decided that independent Ceylon was progressing steadily enough, and its government was stable enough, to guarantee the safety of their business interests in Ceylon. Until about 1951 they overcame their fears of expropriation—but after the death of D. S. Senanayake the major efflux of British people and capital began. Present indications are that there are not more than 3,000 Britons in planting and business in Ceylon. During the past two years many of their investments in Ceylon tea estates have been sold to Ceylonese businessmen and speculators who have bought up the control of big companies incorporated in London.

This widespread fear of political, social and economic insecurity is at the root of the disorders that Ceylon has been going through recently.

Many observers of the Ceylon scene are frankly amazed that ‘language’ appears to be the issue over which the Ceylonese have been killing each other. Underlying this amazement is the often-expressed opinion that it was a retrograde step from the point of view of ‘Progress’, international relations and national unity, to have removed English as the first language of the country, as Ceylon did in ~ This opinion betrays a profound lack of appreciation of what ‘language’ means in countries like Ceylon, India, Pakistan and Burma.

Those who feel that it was a pity to downgrade English to the position of a second language do not realize that only about 5 to 6 per cent of the population were literate in English even after 150 years of British rule in Ceylon—and the standard of ‘literacy’, in this sense, has been the ability to write a signature in English. The actual number of people who used English as their first language was very small. English was, and still is, the prerogative of a minute section of the population. But though small, this section of the population—generally regarded as the middle class—has wielded a monopoly of political, administrative and economic power in Ceylon. They have been accustomed to speak, write, think and even dream in English. The administration of the country was conducted in English. The law is in English and the Courts are conducted in English, although almost 95 per cent of the people do not know any English at all.

Until last year it was not possible to send a telegram unless it was first translated into English. One of the remarkable features of Ceylon is that, unlike in Britain, almost every trade union is directly controlled by politicians. Many visitors to Ceylon have been appalled by this phenomenon and prospective investors bolt when they come across it: it is certainly an unfortunate development but the cause of it, again, was language. The law, as we have seen, was written in a language that 95 per cent of the people did not understand. Every politician, like nature, abhors a vacuum, and the Communists and Trotskyites were quick to rush in to fill it in the field of unionism by acting as interpreters, guides and advocates of

labour. They were responsible for building up a formidable network of trade unions within twenty-five years.

Language, therefore, has been much more complex and significant a problem than is usually appreciated. The switch-over from English as the official language to Swabhasa, or the Mother Tongue, was thus inevitable with the growth of democracy. The awkward question was: which mother tongue— Sinhalese or Tamil or both?

At first glance the answer seems obvious—80 per cent of the people are Sinhalese. Ergo: Sinhalese must be the national language. In fact that is decision of the present all-Sinhalese Government of Ceylon argued when they were campaigning for election in March and April 1956.

The Tamils, however, felt differently. The extent of their participation in public life had been far in excess of their numbers. Tamil leaders had fought shoulder to shoulder with Sinhalese patriots in the struggle for independence. Their language had a rich heritage and was used as a live language by nearly 50,000,000 people in South India and Ceylon. Why, they asked, should it now take second place to a language which is spoken, after all, by only 6,000,000 people? In any case, they asked, why should not the Tamil language be used in the areas where the Tamils predominate?

The election campaign of 1956 was begun on this issue. The United National Party which had been in power for eight years under three Prime Ministers—D. S. Senanayake, Dudley Senanayake, and Sir John Kotelawala—had resolutely refused to create communal disharmony by allowing this dispute to come to a head. But Kotelawala had made the grievous error of publicly stating that his Government would uphold the principle of parity of status for Sinhalese and Tamil. This made it official and feeling became much more violent and open than ever before. The Government party back-benches were embarrassed by the demands of their electorates to save the Sinhalese language from the ‘indignity’ of being yoked with a minority language.

The present Prime Minister, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, despite—or perhaps because of—his aristocratic background and his Oxford education, found no difficulty in denouncing the status quo. His campaign for power was openly based on the cry, ‘Sinhalese Only’. In the English version of his election manifesto he squared his conscience by writing in a clause providing for the ‘reasonable use of Tamil’ but this was conspicuously absent in the more significant Sinhalese version. The Kotelawala Government then made the biggest tactical and moral blunder they could possibly make. Hoping to ride back to power on the popular ‘Sinhalese Only’ wave, they abandoned their policy of parity for Tamil and adopted the Bandaranaike line.

What they had not realized was that the ‘Sinhala Only’ cry was a potent issue only because the Government was opposing it, and that as soon as the Government accepted it too, it ceased to be an issue. Thus Bandaranaike had won his point without a fight and the Kotelawala Government had sacrificed the support of the Tamils and the respect of the liberal-minded middle class. The rest of the campaign was fought on religious issues. The United election front led by Bandaranaike was given massive support by an ad hoc organization of over 12,000 Buddhist monks who came out of their temples and hermitages to canvass openly against the Kotelawala regime which, they claimed, was influenced by the Christians, particularly the Catholics.

Here were the best election agents any politician could wish for—12,000 men whose words were holy to over 5,000,000 people, campaigning for the downfall of the Government, zealously and, what is more, gratis. Bandaranaike also promised the Kandyan peasants that he would drive the Indian Tamil labourer away from the tea estates.

When, on top of this, he offered a socialist programme of nationalizing foreign-owned tea estates and mercantile firms and of evicting the British from Trincomalee harbour and the Negombo Air-field used by the Royal Air Force, he had every popular dissident element in Ceylon behind him. When the election results came in the Government party had lost fifty-two out of sixty seats and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, Bandaranaike's People's United Front, which had offered sixty candidates for election, had won fifty-one seats.

In the predominantly Tamil areas the Federal Party led by S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, who advocated a Federal form of government with equal status for Tamil as an official language, swept the polls. They had presented a slate of fourteen candidates, ten of whom were returned.

There was widespread jubilation at the defeat of a Government which had ruled for eight years without noticeably changing the living conditions of the people. Very soon, however, the new Government, composed largely of tenderfoot politicians who had never been in authority before, realized that there was a vast difference between an election campaign and running a country.

Prime Minister Bandaranaike himself with long years of political experience as a responsible Cabinet Minister behind him, realized this readily enough and tried his best to hold his team of young, inexperienced bucking broncos together. He soon found that the forces which had been released by his victory were too formidable to resist. Labour demands became so vociferous and violent that he was soon compelled to introduce repressive measures which even the Kotelawala Government had not used.

The Communists and the extreme Left Wing members of his own Cabinet, like Food Minister Philip Gunawardene, began putting on the pressure for the nationalization of foreign-owned tea estates, insurance companies and banks. Bandaranaike used his armoury of eloquence to withstand this demand because he realized very well that Ceylon could not risk jeopardizing her best source of income by meddling with the tea estates. He, like his predecessors, also realized that Ceylon could not develop without a considerable flow of new capital from abroad. Bandaranaike found himself the prisoner of his election promises.

To assuage (one of his favourite words) the militant Sinhalese he enacted the Sinhalese Only Act, thereby setting off a series of disorders two months after the new Government took over. This was the first outburst of racialism on such a scale. The area most seriously affected was the Gal Oya Valley—the newly-opened colony for the reclaiming and settlement of the land on the eastern side of Ceylon. Over 150 people were killed during that brief spell of open race-hate. Religious rivalry grew apace. Fortunately there has been no open religious violence up to the moment of writing, although many a flare-up has seemed imminent. In August 1957 the Tamils threatened an island-wide Satyagraha or civil disobedience campaign.

This danger was averted by the forging of a pact between Bandaranaike and the Federal Party leader, Chelvanayakam. Almost exactly a year later the Bandaranaike—Chelvanayakam (or

B—C) Pact was jettisoned, which led to the large-scale riots and bloodshed of May—June 1958. Ceylon is now afflicted by a general malaise which no one can escape sensing. National unity has been shattered. The racial and religious tolerance which leavened our relationships has been sacrificed for political expediency. Increasing poverty and unemployment have

brought the people to the brink of communism. The next outbreak of violence may not be racial or even religious. During the latter days of the 1958 riots the attack was directed noticeably against Government officials and the middle class. The pattern is clear. Unless the Government is able to open up new avenues for employment, increase the productivity of the island quickly and effectively, maintain law and order without succumbing to sectional and separatist demands, when violence breaks out again, it is likely that Ceylon's system of parliamentary democracy will be thrown away for something more 'efficient' and ruthless.

The Fifth Horseman

The Fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse rode into Ceylon in May 1958, without fuss or warning. No one recognized the hoof beats on the dusty, provincial roads, where they were first heard. People knew about War, Pestilence, Famine and Flood—these were disasters which they accepted as part of their human heritage, although they had never suffered seriously from war or pestilence or famine. They had only just come through a devastating flood but, within weeks, the Black Christmas which had brought these waters down had been all but forgotten except by those who had lost a son, daughter or parent. The bounty of nature and of willing friends abroad had swiftly brought the green flush back to the paddy country in the North Central Province.

War they had experienced, too, but it had never been a blight for Ceylon. Very few of our people had ever heard a shot fired in fear or anger. War had brought prosperity to Ceylon, boom prices for tea, rubber, coconut, full employment or as near full employment as we had ever come across before, and a steady bank balance in London so that while we set about building up the agrarian economy we could afford to buy our food with crisp pound notes.

Of pestilence we had had some cruel knowledge. The ravages of malaria and ugly tropical fevers had been experienced by the older people. But with new drugs and new methods of prevention people had begun to take their immunity for granted and to regard their neighbours in perpetually pox-ridden Bombay and Calcutta with lofty sympathy.

Only the greybeards had ever spoken of famine, many, many years ago. But these stories hardly earned a whimper of interest because everyone knows that for a Ceylonese one meal of rice missed is a catastrophe of major magnitude.

Slight though our acquaintance with these disasters was, it was still acquaintance. But for most of our people in 1958 the Fifth Horseman—Race-Hate—was hardly even that. We had heard about the attempts of the Australian settlers to decimate the Aborigines or herd them into Tasmania; we had read of the process by which the Red Indians had been corralled into reservations; we had read of the Nazi gas chambers, Buchenwald and Belsen; and the tribulations of the Jews who exist on their patch of desert in Israel are horribly tender and raw in our memories. We had read the lurid account of how the waters of the Indus and the

Ganges had turned red with the rivulets of blood that flowed into them from the Hindu—Muslim massacres which accompanied the partition of India.

The Gal Oya race-killings of 1956, in Ceylon, and the ugly episode of Little Rock in 1957 should have warned us that the Fifth Horseman took no notice of time, place, literacy or standard of living.

But these episodes did not wake us up in time. It could not possibly happen here. Of course we had heard our parents talk of the Riots of 1915 and the brutalizing of the Muslim population by the Sinhalese, but all those stories were so interlarded with incidents featuring acts of personal heroism that the Cynical Generation put them in the same category as the omnipresent and unfailing family yarn that father always came first in class during his time.

It couldn't happen in Ceylon. That is what we all thought. After all we had lived together, Sinhalese and Tamils, for so long, sharing our profits and losses, celebrating each other's petty triumphs and consoling each other in our misfortunes and, what is more, respecting each other for integrity and for ability when we recognized it. And above all, we had always been able to indulge in mild teasing about each other's idiosyncrasies in much the same way that the English rag the Scots.

It couldn't happen in Ceylon. Of course there were racial and caste prejudices underlying the common pleasantries of social behaviour and of course there were politicians trying to stir these murky depths into foaming activity. But what of that? Look at the composition of the delegation that went to borrow 50,000,000 dollars from Washington at the very time of the race riots in Ceylon—was that not as fair a mixed bag of Ceylonese as you could wish? Here and there you could hear a low growl from someone pointing out that one religious group was conspicuously omitted from that selection.¹ But, peremptorily, you shushed this protest because it was 'divisive' in character and too awkward to deal with anyway, without getting yourself into very deep waters indeed.

So it couldn't happen in Ceylon. But it has happened, and the chances are that it will happen again and again in other forms, perhaps more vicious and meaningless than the tragedy we have just encountered. How did it happen? Where did it begin? What course did it take? That is the burden of this story.

Goondas in Action

In April 1958 the Ministry of Lands and Land Development was advised by its field officers that the projected transfer of 400 Tamil families who had been displaced by the closing down of the Royal Navy dockyards in Trincomalee should be put off for more propitious times. Under the Government's plan these labourers were to be taken to East Padavia for resettlement as farmers on land newly opened for colonies.

Sinhalese colonists from places ranging from Veyangoda to Kosgoda, squatters from various distant places and some of the older established Sinhalese families who regarded this province as being traditionally Sinhalese, were opposed to the settling of Tamils in the Polonnaruwa or Anuradhapura districts. Stirred by the constant cacophony of communalists who had been preaching the gospel of race-hatred in every part of the island for over two years, their objections were shot through with unprecedented bitterness.

In fact, the field officers of the Land Development Department had reported that Action Committees had been formed and that there were open threats of violence if the transfer scheme was carried out. From Kebitigollewa, a little Sinhalese village standing on the Medawachchiya—Pulmoddai Road, had come a direct declaration of war: a war to the knife and the knife to the hilt, should any Tamils pass that way to settle in the farm colonies.

The Government was persuaded to put off the settlement plans.

Meanwhile race-hatred was being churned up elsewhere. Several months before the Tamil Federalists in the north, desperately anxious to find a popular gimmick to symbolize their struggle for linguistic equity, had begun to obliterate with tar the Sinhalese character ~ (Sri) which had replaced the English letters on the registration plates of motor vehicles. New cars moving in the north and the east with the offending letter had their plates smeared with tar. The Tamil 'Shri' character was substituted for the officially accepted Sinhalese character. The Government took a top-level tactical decision not to prosecute any of the offenders for fear that they would be built up into martyrs. Federal supporters went about in the Peninsular and the east coast with illegal number plates.

It is quite true that the use of the Sinhalese character for this purpose at a time when language was a sore point was unnecessary and provocative. Nevertheless the tame decision to permit people, however provoked they may have been, to flout the law blatantly and to continue to do so for months with complete impunity brought the prestige of the Government and the police into abject disrepute. The impression among the Sinhalese in the south was that the Government had abdicated its authority in the northern and eastern provinces of Ceylon. In the north the new buses of the Transport Board—inevitably SRI numbered—were daubed with the equivalent Tamil sign. This set off an ugly wave of reprisals in the predominantly Sinhalese areas.

Bands of Sinhalese rough-necks were suddenly let off the leash in Colombo. Bare bodied, sarongs held shoulder high displaying genitals unashamedly, armed with tar-pails and brushes and brooms they shrieked through the streets of Colombo tarring every visible Tamil letter on street signs, kiosk name boards, bus bodies, destination boards, name plates on gates and bills posted on walls. They were armed with ladders to reach roof level where necessary.

Outside Saraswathie Lodge—a 'Brahmin' thosy kiosk in Bambalapitiya—I watched a gang of these goondas smearing tar on the Tamil language poster advertising the Thinakaran newspaper for sale. Someone shouted to the tar-brush artist:

'Go on. Paint a huge Sinhala Sri sign on the bastard's door.' The artist beamed at this inspiration but his past caught up with him at this very moment. He handed over the brush tamely to another: he himself was completely illiterate. He could not write even in Sinhalese. These were the types who were so vociferous about the glory of the language for which they were willing to exterminate a people and vivisection a nation.

The goondas, once started, did a thorough job of it. They invaded even the public offices—even the relatively sacrosanct second and third floors. In spite of their rank illiteracy they seemed to know where the Tamil politicians lived in Colombo. Their walls were defaced with huge black letters. They even had sufficient sense of dramatic irony and temerity to give the tar brush treatment to the Left-Hand-Drive rear warning plate in English, Sinhalese and Tamil on the Prime Minister's Cadillac.

Within twelve hours they had covered the whole of Colombo. Next day the wave struck the suburbs and the provincial towns. And then the ineluctable wave of reprisals swept through Jaffna and Batticaloa. And the police looked on. They had been given strict—but verbal—instructions not to interfere.

The goondas soon discovered this. On the third day, when they found that they were running short of Tamil signs to tar, they started picking on anyone who looked like a Tamil to keep themselves in training. Two or three men were tarred on the streets. It was only then that the police intervened. But the hate-wave had scudded through the whole island and had now spent itself for the present.

The official response was—no prosecutions. What was the charge anyway? Mischief? Damage to public property? But there was no evidence to convict a crow, let alone the hundreds of men who had rampaged around the streets of Ceylon in hysterical gangs.

The Government ‘deplored’ the ‘incident’, leader writers ‘viewed with alarm’, the police made the obvious guess about ‘who was at the bottom of it’ and the wiseacres wagged their hoary heads and cackled over the dreadful state of Lanka. But no one even attempted seriously to piece these seemingly isolated episodes together and discern a pattern in them. It was just another Untoward Event—like the Ganemulla train fiasco² and the Imbulgoda ambush.³ No one responsible for the preservation of order realized at the time that if such a tide of hatred could sweep through the entire country so swiftly, it could happen again in a more deadly form if the original impact was more powerful and its spread was better managed.

Another dangerous sub-plot in the evolution of the tragic drama was the organized boycott of Tamil-owned kiosks and shops in isolated areas. This campaign had been set afoot by certain militant monks who, with consummate cynicism, chose villages in Attanagalla, the Prime Minister’s own constituency, as the take-off point for their campaign. This movement swiftly spread to other outlying towns such as Welimada, Kurunegala and Badulla.

The Prime Minister, Mr S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, continued with his year-long efforts to convince the people that the Bandaranaike—Chelvanayakam Pact which he had made with the Federal Party a year ago, was a fool-proof solution of the Communal Problem, inspired by his understanding of the doctrine of the Middle Way. For instance, a newspaper reported:

The Prime Minister, Mr S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, presiding at the prize distribution of the Sri Gnanaratna Buddhist Sunday School, Panadura, said that knotty problems of State had been successfully tackled by invoking the principles and tenets of Buddhism. ‘The Middle Path, Maddiyama Prathipadawa, has been my magic wand and I shall always stick by this principle,’ he said. (Ceylon Daily News.)

The yes-men round him smirked complacently whenever he referred to his Magic Wand for solving problems in that special tone of voice which accompanies a double entendre.

Mr Bandaranaike said much the same thing when he justified the Bandaranaike—Chelvanayakam Pact at the Annual Sessions of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party held at Kelaniya on March 1 and 2. The relevant section of his Presidential Address is:

‘In the discussion which the leaders of the Federal Party had with me an honourable solution was reached. In thinking over this problem I had in mind the fact that I am not merely a Prime Minister but a Buddhist Prime Minister. And my Buddhism is not of the “label” variety. I embraced Buddhism because I was intellectually convinced of its worth. At this juncture I said to myself: “Buddhism means so much to me, let me be dictated to only by the tenets of my faith, in these discussions. I am happy to say a solution was immediately forthcoming.’ (Sunday Observer, March 2, 1958.)

But the oftener he defended the B—C Pact the clearer it became that, in the Prime Minister’s own opinion, it needed defending. The longer he delayed its implementation with the twin instruments of the Regional Councils Act and the Reasonable Use of Tamil Act, the weaker became the enthusiasm of the Sinhalese as well as of the Tamils.

The voices of the critics of the B-C Pact seemed to increase in volume and effectiveness as time went by. At the height of the tar-brush campaign it became evident that even within the Government Party there was a wide divergence of opinion about the efficacy of the major miracle of Mr Bandaranaike’s Magic Wand - the B-C Pact. Even his own kin and henchmen muttered together in the dark corridors of Sravasti about how unpopular the Lokka (the Boss) was becoming in the country by persisting in his defence of the Pact. No one dared to approach him—it was hard to endure the whip-crack of the Lokka’s pliant tongue. Till the last moment he spoke in eulogies about the wondrous nature of the B—C Pact, of communal harmony, of brotherhood and of national unity. But no one had yet seen the Bills which for a whole year were being fabricated by the Legal Draughtsmen. And no one was impressed.

The Abrogation of a Pact

On the morning of April 9 a police message reached Mr Bandaranaike warning him that about 200 bhikkus or monks and 300 others were setting out on a visitation to the Prime Minister’s residence in Rosmead Place to demand the abrogation of the Pact. They would arrive at 9 a.m.

The Prime Minister left the house early that morning to attend to some very important work in his office. The bhikkus came, the crowds gathered, the gates of the Bandaranaike Walawwa were closed against them and armed police were hurriedly summoned to throw a barbed-wire cordon to keep the uninvited guests out. The bhikkus decided to bivouac on the street. Peddlers, cool-drink carts, betel sellers and even bangle merchants pitched their stalls hard by. Dhana was brought to the bhikkus at the appointed hour for food.

In the meantime, the Prime Minister was fighting off the opposition to the Pact among his own party colleagues with desperate fury.

At 4.15 p.m. the B—C Pact was torn into pathetic shreds by its principal author who now claimed that its implementation had been rendered impossible by the activities of the Federalists.

The Prime Minister had gone home that afternoon accompanied by half a dozen Ministers who stood on the leeward side of the barbed-wire barricade while Mr Bandaranaike listened to the shrill denunciations of the monks. The Minister of Health sat on the Street facing the monks and preached a sermon, promising them redress if they would only be patient. The Prime Minister consulted his colleagues. The monks had won. The Magic Pact was no more.

But the monks insisted on getting this promise in writing. The Prime Minister went into the house and the Health Minister, hardly able to suppress the look of relief on her face, brought the written pledge out to the monks. Yet another victory for Direct Action had been chalked up.

The nation was left wondering what next. In two years the people had experienced two new theories of politics: government by crisis and government by scapegoat. What crisis next? was the big question.

Then the Communist-party-inspired strikes broke out. The Public Service Workers' Trade Union Federation, whose leadership was Communist but which was mainly independent at the rank-and-file level, staged one of the most costly farces in the history of trade unionism in Ceylon.

The Government, unofficially of course, resorted to thuggery to break the strike.

A gang of thirty-eight thugs, imported, according to police sources, from the Grandpass area and from Shanty Town in McCallum Road, had been organized into a mobile unit. They went round the city in a truck, beating up strikers demonstrating on the streets. The troops were called out to patrol the streets. This had the immediate effect of attracting public sympathy, which previously had been lacking, to the PSWTUF. Opposition Leader N. M. Perera scored a quick political victory for the Trotskyites by demanding the withdrawal of the troops by nightfall of that day or else. . . . The troops were withdrawn despite Food Minister Philip Gunawardene's protests.

The Government tried every device which had been employed by the previous Government against the public servants eleven years ago: the Finance Minister put out propaganda to the effect that there were only 1,750 on strike when actually many thousands were out; the Labour Minister, T. B. Illangaratne, declared the strike illegal and appealed to the patriotic sentiments of the clerks even as the Labour Minister of '947 had appealed to him and his colleagues who were then out on strike; the Food Minister tried to make out that this was a Tamil plot to weaken the Sinhalese Government even as Finance Minister J. R. Jayawardene had tried to drive a communal wedge into the 1947 strike.

But the PSWTUF held out for a fortnight in a futile frenzy at the unexpected ferocity of the Government, which had hitherto capitulated to labour demands supported by some show of violence.

The Government won that battle outright. The Public Service Workers' Trade Union Federation broke up after the strikers split into warring factions and the net economic result was the loss of two weeks' pay for every striker. The Government, without a doubt, had won a major battle. But—it was a pyrrhic victory, which was sufficiently expensive in terms of its reputation as a workers' government to cost it the war, eventually.

From the PSWTUF crisis to the next. The Communist-controlled Ceylon Trade Union Federation, which had come out a day after the PSWTUF, found they had caught a Tartar for once during the past two years. On the management side the Ceylon Employers' Federation, encouraged by the Government's firmness against the PSWTUF, had decided to stage a Custer's Last Stand against political trade unionism. The Prime Minister and the Labour Minister, both heartened by the defeat of the PSWTUF and concerned about the grave losses

to revenue caused by the cancellation of tea shipments, declared the CTUF strike illegal and refused to intervene. The Employers' Federation was advised by the Prime Minister to hold out even as he had done against the clerks. The employers went to it with a will. Large notices appeared in the newspapers calling attention to the illegality of the strike. These were followed by notices calling for new recruits. This too was done at the instance of the Government.

When events had reached this pass, the Trotskyite Unions which had watched the CTUF struggle with lofty detachment were impelled by pressure from their rank and file to make some display of solidarity. From the moment they showed signs of active interest in the CTUF—CEF struggle, the Prime Minister began to relent—perhaps retract is the apter word. Instead of allowing the Employers' Federation to make their last-ditch stand against the Communists, the Prime Minister called for 'negotiations'.

The CEF took the view that there was no point whatever in 'negotiating' at that stage in an illegal strike. But on the ground of national interest the Government pleaded, cajoled and then finally tried to browbeat the employers into agreeing to accept every striker back and retain in addition, if they must, the men already recruited. At the last meeting the Prime Minister threatened to use emergency powers to take over the companies and run them himself if they did not give in. It was dangerous to the CEF to keep the men newly recruited in preference to those on strike, it was argued. The CEF replied that they would cope as best they could. That evening shocking and tangible justification of the Prime Minister's concern for the danger to the CEF was forthcoming.

An explosive meeting of the Communist and Trotskyite Unions was held in Hyde Park—not a hundred yards away from Lipton's Circus, sensitive nerve centre of the dispute.

The police, for some strange reason, withdrew every officer on duty fifteen minutes before the meeting concluded. On a nice calculation, a dashing cracker was exploded in the crowd by a man whose identity the police and press reporters well knew. When the noise died down hysterical panic took over. The mob ran panting, bleating, slobbering with fear and subhuman anger, breaking every glass window and door in the vicinity. A dispensary which had no connection whatever with the dispute had its show windows and giant coloured bottle smashed to smithereens. The tea kiosk at the corner, which had supplied meals to the strikers for weeks, was damaged. Several Ceylonese firms—Car Mart, United Tractors, Tuckers, Bousteads—against whom the CTUF had no quarrel whatever at the time, were given the 'treatment'. Passing cars were stoned. A taxi was burned. Some motor bicycles were set on fire. A hunt began for 'Europeans' to molest and, maybe, lynch.

There was pandemonium for forty minutes. Then the police returned and restored order. It was a very costly forty minutes. Thuggery had scored another victory. None of the miscreants was prosecuted.

The employers still held out. The Prime Minister who, not a fortnight before, had denounced the strike as illegal was now all for appeasement. He threatened again to nationalize the CEF firms. Their answer was direct: 'If we capitulate to the CTUF now we might as well pack up for good.' They were determined to call what they believed to be the Government's bluff. The impasse was complete.

Elsewhere, in the meantime, the next crisis which was to help the Government over the labour crisis was gathering. The Fifth Horseman had pounded his way into Ceylon with his treacherous army of destruction.

Tension in the North Central Province

The Annual Federal Party Convention began at about this time in Vavuniya, forty miles from Anuradhapura, the capital of the Sinhalese-dominated district.

The Federalists, whose bid for recognition as the party of the Tamil-speaking people had reached its peak in May, June and July 1957, had dissipated a great deal of this popularity in their futile indignation over the ~ sign on vehicles. The longer Mr Bandaranaike put off the enactment of the Regional Councils Bill and the Reasonable Use of Tamil Bill the dimmer became the lustre of the halo worn by Mr Chelvanayakam, the Federalist leader.

In the north and the east other voices which had been shouted down a year before began to be heard again. The conviction grew that Mr Bandaranaike had never intended to implement the B—C Pact and that therefore the Federal Party had been bamboozled into calling off the massive satyagraha they had planned for August 1957.

Mr Bandaranaike's sudden volte face on April 9, when he broke up the pact which he himself had forged, set the pendulum of popularity swinging back in favour of the Federalists. They appeared once more in public as the aggrieved party. Mr Chelvanayakam was seen again as the martyred victim of the Government's duplicity.

Mr Bandaranaike, for his part, declared that notwithstanding the abrogation of the Pact he would present the two controversial Bills guaranteeing 'fair play' to the Tamils when Parliament reconvened in June.

This announcement was greeted with loud protests from the militant Sinhala elements who stood by the slogan: 'Ceylon for the Sinhalese' and 'Sinhalese Only from Point Pedro to Dondra Head'.

This in turn increased the fervour of the Tamils for a separate State.

It was in this atmosphere that the Vavuniya Convention was prepared. The Federal Party Chiefs, sensing the mood of the moment, went all out to make the convention a key event. Special arrangements were made in advance for the transport of delegates and supporters from every part of the island. Extra bogeys were attached to the train from Batticaloa.

At this stage our story ties up with the disturbances over the resettlement of Tamil labour in Polonnaruwa and Padaviya related earlier. Sinhalese labourers had organized themselves as a striking force against any infiltration of Tamils from Trincomalee. This loose organization had been employed before— on two or three occasions—as shock troops which acted at the instigation of certain politicians to whom they were beholden. A year ago they had been sent as far as Maho to break up a meeting called to hear Dudley Senanayake denouncing the B—C Pact.

In May—June 1957 confronted by the threat of a mass satyagraha by the Tamils, Sinhalese settlers and labourers in the Padaviya area had been warned by the politicians to prepare

themselves against a Tamil invasion from the Trincomalee district. They began to refer to themselves in epic terms as the Sinhala Hamudawa or the Sinhalese Army. But the tension had eased on both sides of the communal barrier when the Bandaranaike—Chelvanayakam Pact was signed at the end of July that year. The Sinhalese politicians, too, had then shown signs of remorse. The Minister of Lands had instructed his officials to set apart 400 allotments for the Tamil labourers who were being laid off by the evacuation of the Royal Navy from Trincomalee. On the basis of five to a family this meant the settling of 2,000 Tamils in Padaviya.

The Sinhalese labourers, however, would have none of it. Led by a monk, a gang of Sinhalese squatters came in one night and occupied eleven Wadiyas intended to accommodate the Tamils who would camp there to clear the land for settlement.

The Ministry could or would do nothing to counter this forcible occupation. Once again the Government, by inaction, gave its tacit sanction to a fait accompli carried out deliberately and openly by people who seemed to be confident of being able to flout authority with impunity. The squatters formed Action Committees and proceeded to clear the land and settle in according to the pattern set by the official settlers.

Their political bosses now decided to use these ‘shock troops’ to stage demonstrations against the Tamils bound for the Vavuniya Convention. There is reason to believe that no murderous violence was intended at this stage. The orders were to stone buses and trains, hoot and generally signify ‘disapprobation’. The Sinhalese labourers were ready and began the treatment on random passers-by who happened to be Tamil, even before the real trek to Vavuniya began.

But events moved too fast for them. On May 22, five hundred thugs and hooligans invaded the Polonnaruwa station, and smashed up the windows of the Batticaloa train in their frantic search for Convention-bound Tamils. The General Manager of Railways, Mr E. Black, said:

‘According to the information we have—telegraph wires too have been cut—passengers entraining from Batticaloa were alarmed at threats that a gang was to attack them as they were under the impression that most of the passengers were going to the Federal Convention at Vavuniya. At Welikande, all but one of the passengers got off the train in fear. The train went on to Polonnaruwa with the one passenger. At midnight, as the train steamed in, the gang set about the train and the lone passenger. The train was stopped and left for Colombo at 7 a.m. this morning without a single passenger. The incident occurred at midnight. The passenger was sent to hospital by the Railway Officers there. A Railway Official was sent from Colombo today to hold an inquiry.’

The Observer reported this incident in more detail on May 24:

‘On Thursday night, passengers were intimidated into getting off at Welikande as news had reached them that a gang of men were on the way to prevent them from making the trip as they felt that passengers must be prevented from getting to Vavuniya for the Federal Convention.

One passenger however continued the trip but was severely assaulted at Polonnaruwa station. A gang of men, alleged to have numbered nearly 500, got on the train at this station, smashed

windows, went from carriage to carriage looking for passengers, damaging railway equipment as they did so.

They found one passenger who cowered in his seat, pleading with them to leave him alone as he did not belong to the community they were looking for.

“You are all the same”, was the reply and they began assaulting him. He was later despatched to hospital.

All telegraph wires had been cut and there is still no communication between Polonnaruwa and Colombo. The train which should have arrived in Colombo that morning, left the station at 7 a.m. in the morning and arrived in Colombo late last evening. Meanwhile a Board of Inquiry has been despatched to Polonnaruwa by the General Manager.’

On the night of the 23rd at 9.15 p.m. the Batticaloa— Colombo train was derailed at the 215th mile on the Batticaloa—Eravur line. Two men, Police-Sergeant Appuhamy and railway porter Victor Fernando, were killed in the wreck. Many others were injured, some of them very seriously. Hoodlums, on the watch for Vavuniya-bound passengers, attacked the wrecked train. Fortunately there were only forty-seven people on that train. The wreckers had made a serious miscalculation. There were very few Tamils on board. And it was the Sinhalese who suffered most.

At 6 p.m. on May 24 a crowd—nearly a thousand strong— again invaded the premises of the Polonnaruwa railway station. They assaulted everybody in sight, including Sinhalese travellers and railway officials, and damaged a good deal of railway property.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Johnpillai who was travelling on leave to Valaichenai at the time, was beaten up at Giritale. Timely arrival of police patrols saved his life. Mr Johnpillai, who was in a critical condition, was rushed to hospital together with several others who had suffered at the hands of the goondas.

That night police sources reported that after an armed party had cleared the crowd out of the railway station things were reasonably quiet. But the Railway Department took the precaution of cancelling, immediately, all trains which were scheduled to run between Batticaloa and Colombo.

Polonnaruwa Aflame

Polonnaruwa town was buzzing with people and carefully calculated rumours. They huddled en masse in the streets, exchanging stories of a threatened Tamil invasion from Trincomalee and from Batticaloa. Labourers from the Land Development Department, the Irrigation Department and from the Government farms who made up the Sinhala Hamudawa were constantly on the rampage, raping, looting and beating up Tamil labourers and public officers. The rumours that a Tamil army was marching to destroy Polonnaruwa gave the roughnecks a heroic stature. More veerayas (heroes) joined in to share the glory of saving the ancient Sinhalese capital from the Tamil hordes as their ancestors had done a thousand years before them.

A notable feature of these activities was that the Sinhalese colonists who had settled in the area for some years, and therefore had some stake in general orderliness, took no part in the

rioting. The vast majority of the Hamudawa were imported Government labourers and the rest were recently arrived squatters who had no roots yet in the area.

Many of these labourers were marked 'present' on the check-rolls while they were busy marauding in the town area. It would have taken a brave supervising officer to refuse to mark their attendance. Some of these men, in fact, had their attendance marked simultaneously in two places—on the check roll at their work places and on the register of the remand jail after they were arrested.

There was some evidence of method in all this madness—it was crudely but effectively planned. The rioters had arranged signals—one peal of a temple bell to signify police, two to signify army and so on. They also had a simple system of hand signals to give their associates in the distance such information as which way a police patrol went. The element of planning was even more evident in the agent provocateur system which was widely used. Many thugs—some of them well-known criminals—had shaved their heads and assumed the yellow robes of a bhikku.

A taxi driver known to the police as a bad hat of a stopped on the road. He had a shaven head. Under the cushions of the seat they found two soiled yellow robes. Police reports record that two 'monks' arrested for looting and arson were car-drivers by 'occupation'. These phoney priests went about whipping up race-hatred, spreading false stories and taking part in the lucrative side of this game—robbery and looting.

Whenever the police went after a looter with a shaven head he disappeared into a house and came back in the invulnerable robes of a monk. Monks were ordained in Polonnaruwa in those few days faster than ever before in the history of Upasampada, the Buddhist ordination ceremony. They paid no attention to the sacrilege they were committing in the sacred robes that the Buddha Himself had worn. This menace became so bad that the police took a decision to arrest every man with a shaven head. They later discovered that a few innocent Muslims had fallen into their net.

All this went on while Polonnaruwa had no government nor even a Government Agent of its own. The Government Agent of Anuradhapura, Deryck Aluwihare, had been ordered to look after both provinces in perhaps the toughest assignment ever given to a young Civil Servant. With the assistance of a few civil administration officers, a small police force under A.S.P. Bertram Weerasinghe and a small army unit of fifty men (and with no orders yet from Colombo), he was flying between Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, trying to maintain order. He had asked for reinforcements from Colombo but the Government seemed reluctant to take the situation in the North Central Province seriously.

Community life in Polonnaruwa was completely disorganized. The bazaar was seething with frenzied hatred. The first task of the administration, or what there was of it, was to provide a refuge for the Tamils whose lives were in danger—it was quite impossible to protect isolated people with the meagre means at their disposal. The Government Agent organized a refugee camp hard by the Kachcheri. Refugees streaming into the camp soon disorganized the rudimentary sanitary arrangements which had been provided.

Before very long the goondas turned their spite against the Tamil officials in the Government offices. Government Agent Aluwihare then set up a refugee camp for them in an isolated Irrigation Department bungalow, stationing five policemen there for their protection. The

people, the Government Agent and the refugees knew deep within themselves how vulnerable they were. How could five policemen defend this house against hundreds of hoodlums demented by blood lust?

The situation of the refugees became worse when the merchants, under threat of reprisals from the goondas, refused point blank to sell foodstuffs to the officials looking after the refugees.

A quick decision was taken. Army personnel commandeered whatever provisions were needed under the Government Agent's receipt.⁴

The thugs displayed a temerity which was quite unprecedented. They had complete assurance that the police would never dare to open fire. The Apey Aanduwa (The government is ours) bug had got deep into their veins. As the situation deteriorated, desperate measures were needed. The ringleaders of the racial revolt and people suspected of using their position and influence to stir up trouble were arrested. Among them were half a dozen chairmen of village committees and a few other parish pump politicians. The goondas had developed a slick technique of throwing dynamite. They carried it in the breast pockets of their shirts, with the fuse hanging out. As the 'enemy' approached they struck a match, lit the fuse, pulled out the stick of dynamite and flung it at point-blank range.

On May 24 and 25 murder stalked the streets in broad daylight. Fleeing Tamils, and Sinhalese who were suspected of having given them sanctuary, had their brains strewn about. A deaf mute scavenging labourer was assaulted to death in the Hingurakgoda area—just to see what had made him tick. The goondas burnt two men alive, one at Hingurakgoda, and the other at Minneriya.

On the night of May 25, one of the most heinous crimes in the history of Ceylon was carried out. Almost simultaneously, on the Government farms at Polonnaruwa and Hingurakgoda, the thugs struck remorselessly. The Tamil labourers in the Polonnaruwa sugar-cane plantation fled when they saw the enemy approaching and hid in the sugar-cane bushes. The goondas wasted no time. They set the sugar cane alight and flushed out the Tamils. As they came out screaming, men, women and children were cut down with home-made swords, grass-cutting knives and katties, or pulped under heavy clubs.⁵

At the Government farm at Hingurakgoda, too, the Tamils were slaughtered that night. One woman in sheer terror embraced her two children and jumped into a well. The rioters were enjoying themselves thoroughly. They ripped open the belly of a woman eight months pregnant, and left her to bleed to death. First estimates of the mass murders on that night were frightening: 150—200 was a quick guess on the basis of forty families on an average of four each. This estimate was later pruned down to around seventy, on the basis of bodies recovered and the possibility that many Tamils had got away in time.

The hoodlums were now motorized. They roamed the district in trucks, smashing up kiosks and houses and killing any Tamils who got in their way.

On the morning of May 26, the expected Emergency had not yet been proclaimed. The situation in Polonnaruwa seemed beyond hope. Government Agent Aluwihare, ASP. Weerasinghe and their colleagues had not had a wink of sleep or rest for four days. They had been promised army reinforcements and Bren guns but there were no signs of their coming.

The refugee camps were now overcrowded.

Aluwihare had a hunch that the Irrigation bungalow which gave sanctuary to the Tamil public officers was no longer safe and he had moved its occupants into the main camp near the Kachcheri. The police had received information that the goondas from Minneriya, Hingurakgoda and Padaviya were planning to build up their forces for a major assault on the night of May 26. The targets were to be the refugee camp and the police station in which the public officials—mostly Sinhalese—had taken refuge. The basis of the war had shifted it was an all-out struggle against the forces of authority who stood in the way of the Sinhala Hamuduwa taking complete control of Polonnaruwa.

That morning at about 8.30 Government Agent Aluwihare and a Land Development Officer, Vasa de Silva, who was doing yeoman service in the district, were jeeping down a long lonely roadway which led to the bund of the Parakrama Samudra. They were on the look-out for a suitable site for a second refugee camp, away from the main centre of excitement. Suddenly they saw signs that the goondas had passed that way. There were three bodies on the road. They stopped the jeep and dismounted to see if there was any life left in the bodies. The first man they looked at was very dead indeed. His brain had spilled out on the roadway. As Aluwihare was turning away he heard shouting and saw a huge truck load of about fifty thugs advancing on them from the front. They were shouting 'There's the Government Agent. Kill him. That's the rascal who is helping the Tamils. Kill him'

The two officers whipped their jeep round. It must have been a terrifying ordeal. They managed to escape only because between them and the advancing truck the road had been strewn with new metal which had not yet been rammed down. The truck bobbed up and down, preventing the thugs from shooting, and was delayed just long enough for the officers to turn the jeep and speed to the safety of the police station.

All morning, apparently by prior arrangement, the goondas were building up their forces. From Minneriya, Giritale and Hingurakgoda the gangs converged on Polonnaruwa for a door-die attack on the last bastion of authority—the police station. The police station was now crowded with Sinhalese officials against whom the terrorism was now being directed because they were the symbol of law and order.

The defenders were in a desperate plight. The police rank and file were afraid that if they made a fight of it against the terrorists they would be hauled up before a Commission of Inquiry. This fear of a political inquisition had sapped their morale considerably and it was mainly their confidence in their officers which enabled them even to make a show of resistance. The mob was certain that the police would never shoot and their experience of the past two years during which the politicians had publicly denounced the police and taken the side of the crowd, right or wrong, increased the fears of the police.

At about noon Government Agent Aluwihare and A.S.P. Bertram Weerasinghe⁶ and their wives went to lunch at the Polonnaruwa rest house.

About 1000 goondas were lying about on the slope leading to the rest house, recuperating their strength for the Grand Finale they were going to stage that night. About fifty of them suddenly walked into the rest house. The women, including Mrs Miriam Gaskell, the rest house keeper, were asked to stay in. Aluwihare and Weerasinghe met the men in the veranda and asked them what they wanted. They wanted tea. Mrs Gaskell accordingly made tea for

her 'guests', who departed peacefully enough except that they ignored the regulation that refreshments had to be paid for.

As the day wore on the tension increased. The crowds outside the police station had grown to about 3,000. The small army unit and the handful of police kept them at bay. But the goondas were enjoying themselves, hooting, hurling obscenities at the police and the officials. They caught a Tamil official making his way to the station and beat him up to the gates of the station and then withdrew. The police dared not fire and the army said that they had no orders to shoot if there was a charge.

The refugees in the station breathed a huge sigh of relief when they saw the promised army reinforcements coming in. It was 2 p.m. It was only a platoon of twenty-five men—half the unit having been ordered to relieve Hingurakgoda. Things were no longer hopeless, however, because the new platoon had brought a Bren gun.

The arrival of army reinforcements drove the goonda leaders into a frenzied 'conference'. Later events showed that they had taken the size of the unit as an indication that this was only the advance party of a larger force that would arrive that afternoon to relieve the beleaguered town. Their decision was attack now before the opposition was better fortified.

The Bren gun was mounted near the gate. At 3.20 p.m. the first wave of goondas advanced towards the police station, with sarongs lifted, shouting obscenities and coarse defiance. They were still confident that Apey Aanduwa would not shoot them down.

As they came nearer, the Bren fired a burst over their heads to warn them. This had just the opposite effect. They took it as confirmation that the army was only bluffing. The roar of the crowd became louder and the obscenities more defiant. The entire 3,000 now began to swarm towards the barricade. At this point the army unit commander said that he needed authority to open fire. Aluwihare signed the order. The officer put the paper in his pocket and walked out. On came the mob. They were only a few yards away now. One man in front raised his sarong, displaying his genitals in foul defiance of the army. The Bren opened fire and the passionate exhibitionist fell dead. Two of his comrades shared his fate.

The crowd scattered in all directions as the Bren stuttered briefly. Men who had been borne up by a demoniacal courage reinforced by an assurance that they were politically protected now fled screaming in terror, and forgathered in groups far away from the range of the gun.

Forty-five minutes later the Minister of Lands, C. P. de Silva, M.P. for Polonnaruwa, accompanied by his Director of Land Development, Chandra de Fonseka, arrived at the police station. They had flown in from Colombo and had seen the havoc at Hingurakgoda en route. The Minister's first comment was: 'This is worse than Gal Oya in 1956.'

The goondas accosted their M.P. and demanded his explanation for the shooting of their three comrades. The burden of their lament was that the Government Agent, the police and the army had killed Sinhalese veerayas while protecting the Tamils. 'We did not send you to Parliament to get your army to kill Sinhalese,' they wailed.

It must have been a devilishly tricky dilemma for the Minister. He knew very well, as he told the officials, that the shooting of the three hoodlums had prevented a massacre of hundreds in Polonnaruwa that afternoon. But it was politically very awkward for him as the M.P. for the

area and Minister in charge of the settlements in the district to answer the persistent question: Why is the army killing Sinhalese?

The Horror Spreads

This question was going to loom large in the next few days and twist the entire picture out of focus.

If there had been any chance whatever at this stage of keeping Sinhalese tempers under control it vanished completely following the Prime Minister's broadcast call to the nation of May 26. The call was, no doubt, well intentioned and a statement to the nation was, for once, essential and even overdue. But, unwittingly or otherwise, it contained a reference which had the effect of blowing raw oxygen into a fire that was already raging vigorously. By a strangely inexplicable perversion of logic Mr Bandaranaike tried to explain away a situation by substituting the effect for the cause. The relevant portion of the speech was:

An unfortunate situation has arisen resulting in communal tension. Certain incidents in the Batticaloa District where some people lost their lives, including Mr D. A. Seneviratne, a former Mayor of Nuwara Eliya, have resulted in various acts of violence and lawlessness in other areas—for example Polonnaruwa, Dambulla, Galawela, Kuliyaipitiya and even Colombo.

The killing of Seneviratne on May 25 was thus officially declared to be the cause of the uprising, although the Communal riots had begun on May 22 with the attack on the Polonnaruwa Station and the wrecking of the Batticaloa—Colombo train and several other minor incidents.

No explanation was offered by the Prime Minister for singling out Seneviratne's name for particular mention from the scores of people who had lost their lives during those critical days. Did the fact that he was a wealthy man rate him a special mention in a Call to the Nation at such a moment?

No effort was made to check whether the Seneviratne killing was a political affair or the outcome of a private feud as suggested by Mr S. J. V. Chelvanayakam during the debate in Parliament on June 4. If it was, indeed, a 'private' murder, the use of this man's name in that context was a grievous and costly error.

Almost unnoticeably the tension spread to Colombo and the suburbs. From Pettah, Slave Island, Wellawatte, Dehiwela, Mount Lavinia, Ratmalana and Maradana reports of Tamils being beaten up by hoodlums came in clusters, but they still did not add up to a really massive campaign. Not yet.

Among the Sinhalese people in Colombo at any rate, the general attitude so far was expressed in the words: *Garandi marala pau gannawa* (Damning oneself by killing harmless rat-snakes). This was the working-class response—among the factory workers, the office boys in mercantile offices—except here and there where the communal bug had nested for long. Among the middle class—the clerks and the English educated people—the distaste for the trend of events was more marked and positive. Weary of two years of increasing lawlessness and with nerves frayed by the industrial and political storms and crises that had driven the nation into a state of perpetual dementia, the middle class and the 'intelligentsia' of the

country felt violently repulsed at this display of racial cannibalism. But worse was to come. A nation, mollycoddled by nature and pampered by Fate, was to undergo its worst ordeal yet.

On Tuesday morning, May 27, at seven-fifteen, a group of citizens⁷, who had distinguished themselves in various fields of public activity, called urgently to see the Prime Minister and implored him to proclaim a State of Emergency. Mr Bandaranaike's answer was that it was an 'exaggeration' to call the situation an 'emergency'. His supplicants later said they were appalled at the insouciance with which the Prime Minister appeared to be taking the mass murders, looting and lawlessness which had broken out everywhere in Ceylon.

It is not difficult to find a likely explanation for Premier Bandaranaike's calculated astigmatism. The ghosts of a previous regime were haunting Rosmead Place, night and day. The hartal of 1953, one day of mass violence and arson, had coerced Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake to advise the Governor-General to proclaim an emergency. In the resulting military activity nine rioters were killed and an innocent passenger in a taxicab was shot by a sentry whose challenge the driver had not heard. The entire episode had left an ugly taste in the mouth of every Ceylonese and there is no doubt that the hartal disturbances, and the consequent increase in the unpopularity of the Government of that time, were the principal causes of the resignation of Mr Senanayake.

'Emergency', therefore, was a synonym for 'confession of failure' in Mr Bandaranaike's Thesaurus. Even during the first rash of communal killings that occurred two months after he became Prime Minister in 1956 the reports of at least 150 people being slaughtered by mobs had not impelled him to call an emergency. He had survived that conflict because the police, not yet demoralized by two years of official condonement of thuggery, had acted firmly—even against Government party politicians who were inciting people to riot.

The Prime Minister, presumably, was confident that he would come through the 1958 massacre, too, with a little bit of luck and some judicious 'tide watching'.⁸

While this discussion was going on, Colombo was on fire. The goondas burnt fifteen shops in the Pettah and a row of kiosks in Mariakaday. Looting on a massive scale took place in Pettah, Maradana, Wellawatte, Ratmalana, Kurunegala, Panadura, Kalutara, Badulla, Galle, Matara and Weligama.

The cry everywhere in the Sinhalese districts was 'Avenge the murder of Seneviratne'. Even the many Sinhalese who had been appalled by the goonda attacks on Tamils and Tamil-owned kiosks, now began to feel that the Tamils had put themselves beyond the pale. Across the country this new mood of deep-seated racism surged. The Prime Minister's peace call to the Nation had turned into a war cry.

Another vicious story, fabricated by a ghoul with a keen sense of melodrama, careered through the country leaving a trail of arson and murder after it.

A female teacher from Panadura, the story went, who was teaching in a school in the Batticaloa District, had been set upon by a gang of Tamil thugs. They had cut off her breasts and killed her. Her body was being brought home to Panadura for cremation. On the morning of May 27 the Panadura townsfolk whispered it around that the mutilated body had been brought home. In the bazaar there was sudden pandemonium.

The goondas intensified their depredations. They ransacked Tamil-owned shops and beat up shopkeepers and passers-by. A gang of goondas rushed into the Hindu temple, and attempted to set fire to it. In their frenzy they were clumsy and failed to get the fire going. But they had a more interesting idea. They pulled an officiating priest out of the Kovil and burnt him into a cinder. The story of the mutilation and murder of a Panadura teacher gained such currency that the Ministry of Education despatched a senior Inspector of Schools to investigate. His report: there was not an iota of truth in the story. He also discovered, when he checked through the records, that there was no female teacher from Panadura on the staff of any school in the Batticaloa district.⁹

As panic spread, doors were closed in Sinhalese as well as Tamil homes. The Tamils closed their doors to escape murder, rape and pillage. The Sinhalese closed their doors to prevent Tamils running into their houses for shelter. But there were many Sinhalese, living in the midst of thuggery, whose innate decency and humanity triumphed over their natural terror. One family took in sixteen Tamils who came to them for shelter. They were fed and accommodated in a single locked room for three days. Neighbours' or servants' gossip would have destroyed over a score of lives.

Yet another fiendish rumour had been circulated to inflame the Sinhalese. This was the story of the 'Tar Baby'. In Batticaloa, it appeared, a Sinhalese baby had been snatched from its mother's arms and immersed in a barrel of boiling tai~. The atrocities increased with alarming rapidity.

Among the hundreds of acts of arson, rape, pillage, murder and plain barbarity some incidents may be recorded as examples of the kind of thuggery at work.

Young Annesly Mendis of Moratuwa and a friend of his, both employed as Technical Assistants in the Irrigation Department at Polonnaruwa, decided to flee the district with their families as the terrorism was now directed against Government officials. They set out from Polonnaruwa in two cars, taking the Giritale—Naula Road, expecting to reach Matale by a circuitous route. Mendis, in his old Ford Prefect, carried his wife, her few months old child, and an ayah. Soon after they set out Mendis's car developed engine trouble. They managed to sputter into Giritale, but there the Ford packed up.

Here they were advised by Engineer Dias Abasing to take the road through the Elahera Irrigation Department camp to Naula, as he had received information that the more direct Habarana Road would soon become dangerous. Mrs Mendis, the baby and the ayah were transferred to the other car and three friends who had come along for the ride transferred to the Ford. The important thing was to get the women and children away. Mendis tinkered around with the Ford and managed to get the engine working again. As they were about to set out a youth called Leo Fernando—who had changed his name discreetly from the Tamil Fernandopulle after the Gal Oya riots—was offered a lift. There were now five in the car—Mendis, Fernando, a young man named Walatara and two others.

The first car, miraculously, got away. The mobs had not yet congregated on the road. The Ford limped into Diyabaduma and was promptly surrounded by 200 terrorists. The leaders greeted them with a hostile question: 'Aren't you Tamil?' They protested that they were Sinhalese. Mendis was forced out of the car and asked to recite a gatha—a Buddhist stanza in Pali. Being a Methodist he knew no gathas. He had also a bad stammer and fear made it worse so that he could not explain himself.

The mob began to beat him up. Bleeding from his head and ears Mendis ran down the street. They shot him in the back. Insatiable, they then dragged Leo Fernando out of the car and hacked him to death without any palaver. In the confusion the other occupants of the car escaped into the jungle and reached Colombo two days later. Mendis's body was carried, tied to a pole like a shot animal, to the far side of the bazaar. The goondas poured petrol over the mutilated bodies. Within minutes Mendis and Fernando were two hideous heaps of charcoal. Not satisfied yet, the goondas burnt the Ford and dumped its charred remains in the Elahara irrigation channel.

In the Colombo area the number of atrocities swiftly piled up. The atmosphere was thick with hate and fear. The thugs ran amok burning houses and shops, beating-up pedestrians, holding-up vehicles and terrorizing the entire city and the suburbs.

A Government official's house was invaded by a gang of hoodlums under the captaincy of one man who was obviously drunk on the perverse delight of seeing other people suffer. Under his orders his stooges began stripping the window curtains and piling up the furniture to make a bonfire. The family huddled in a room waiting for the worst—father, mother and five little children. The chief thug broke into the room and saw them standing hypnotized by terror. Sweating, panting, his eyes bloodshot with frenzied hate, he paused to look at the family he was about to destroy. Then, suddenly, something seemed to click in his mind. He asked, pointing to the children:

‘Are all these yours?’

The father nodded, a great sob cracking his throat. The thug clapped his hand to his forehead and said: ‘Anney—I have two myself,’ and walked out of the room. Calling his gang together he left the house still intact.

Another Tamil officer working in the same Government department was not so fortunate. The thugs stormed into his house and assaulted his wife and grown-up daughter in the presence of his little child. His mind cracked under the shock. In the French liner Laos which took the family away to safety in Jaffna he insisted on reciting large chunks of the Bhagavad Gita to the captain of the ship. All his formal education—he is a Cambridge scholar—had proved useless to him in the face of disaster. His broken mind reached out for the only solace a man has when his own ingenuity and ability have proved futile.

At Wellawatte Junction, near the plantain kiosk, a pregnant woman and her husband were set upon. They clubbed him and left him on the pavement. Then they kicked the woman repeatedly as she hurried along at a grotesque sprint, carrying her swollen belly.

A great deal of property was destroyed in the wave of arson which hit Mount Lavinia and Ratmalana on May 27. Mr R. R. Selvadurai, a former Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Justice, was one of those who lost his house. He had at first been reluctant to accept warnings of impending trouble, and had in any case no wish to leave until he had made contact with his sons, who were out.

Fortunately for the family the two young men got home just in time for them all to escape with their lives and take shelter in a police station where over 1000 Tamils had already sought refuge. Mr Selvadurai learnt that night that his house had been burnt. Next morning he and his son tried to salvage at least his books, and a few remaining pieces of furniture, but

they were seen by a group of eight thugs who quickly made sure that even these relics of his property should not be left to him.

While the Prime Minister was telling the citizens' delegation that it was an 'exaggeration to call the situation an emergency' in every village from Kalawewa to Nalanda people's houses were in flames.

When an eye witness reached Dambulla it was still intact. In a few minutes a factory-new Ceylon Transport Board 'Special' arrived loaded with 'passengers'. They disembarked and swiftly set about their business: in ten minutes six houses were blazing. And hell spread through the bazaar.

Batticaloa Killings

Soon after the Polonnaruwa incidents of May 23 and 24 the madness spread to Eravur in the Eastern Province. The Tamils in this area retaliated against isolated Sinhalese homes and trades people. Tamil fishermen waged a sea-shore battle against Sinhalese fishermen who were driven out to sea. They dared not return to the east coast and were not seen for days. Police feared serious loss of life at sea but later reports indicated that the fishermen had landed here and there on the south coast.

Tamil goondas set up road blocks and interrupted traffic. Like their Sinhalese counterparts they cross-examined passengers who were dragged out, beaten up and deprived of their belongings if they were suspected to be Sinhalese.

One Sinhalese driver whose duties had taken him to Batticaloa was returning to Colombo on May 26. They caught him near a causeway and interrogated him. His terror was so great that he could not speak. 'Who are you?' they asked. 'Are you Sinhalese or Tamil or Muslim?' The man was still speechless. They persisted. Eventually he found his tongue. When they asked him for a tenth time to state his race: 'Lanji,' he spluttered, trying to make 'Lansi' (Burgher) sound Tamil. Immediately he realized his mistake but the thugs were satisfied. They let him go on his way.

From May 23—when the first train derailment took place— up to Tuesday, May 27—the day on which a State of Emergency was declared—the highest incidence of violence in the Batticaloa district was in the Eravur area.

With the news of the first train derailment, many Sinhalese in the area had already left their homes and begun a hazardous trek to places of safety. Some went into the jungles where many of them gave up their lives to hunger and to the animals.

When the number of police in the area were augmented by military personnel, on May 27 and 28, they drove along the edges of jungles announcing through their mobile loudspeakers that people who were within hearing distance should come out to safety. Those who were still alive accepted this offer. The corpses of the others were discovered in various stages of decomposition. In one case, the police found the bodies of a mother and child whom she had been breast-feeding at the time of death.

The Sinhalese who had not fled their homes or who were intercepted in flight by berserk Tamil goondas suffered a similar fate. In the heart of Eravur a Sinhalese man and his wife

were assaulted and set on fire. Their belongings were then looted and their dwelling place burnt down.

Homes which had been evacuated were given the chulu light treatment. First: goods which could be of any use were looted. Then, a liberal dose of kerosene was splashed on the walls of the house, and a chulu light was flung at it. The police were helpless. Their numbers were too small—they did not even have sufficient men to release one or two of them to guard the Public Works Department powder magazine at Batticaloa— and, besides, they had received no orders to shoot and fight back with methods which would give them some hope of getting the Tamil hoodlums under control.

In a few places hand-bombs were thrown at cars. Mercifully, by this time people had been sufficiently scared for many of them to cancel proposed trips to the area. The damage might otherwise have been much greater.

Ironically, in the town of Batticaloa itself—the area chosen as the centre of the Tamil Kingdom of the Eastern Province by Tamil extremists—the damage to Sinhalese life and property was relatively small. In fact, Tamil kiosk keepers closed shop and sought sanctuary in areas where members of their own community were amassed in greater numbers at the very hint of disturbances. During the first few days of the rioting the Tamils who had stayed behind in Batticaloa town, mainly public servants stationed in the area, bought their provisions, groceries and food from Sinhalese shops which plied a brisk and highly profitable trade.

Then, two stories came through from the south to step up the fury of the mobs. First, there was the rumoured death of a Tamil fiscal clerk at Kalutara. As the story went, a Tamil fiscal clerk who had almost reached the official age of retirement, but who had expressed a wish to work a few months longer so as to qualify for the best possible pension with which he would have to fend for himself, his wife and nine children, had been transferred a few weeks earlier from Vavuniya to Kalutara. He had protested against his transfer, the story continued, but had been forced to accept it. Now, he was dead. One report said that he had been burnt alive; another that he had been hacked to death.

Second, reports came in of what had happened to the Kovil, the Hindu priest, and many other Tamils in Panadura. Even here, the reports varied as did the estimates of the number killed. But the details were unimportant. Blood was all that the goondas wanted. In the chaos that followed it was almost impossible for anybody to keep a count of who had been injured, who had been lynched, and what had been burnt—so swiftly did the goondas move from area to area, and so ruthlessly did they set about their tasks of destruction.

The official figures are: 56 cases of arson, and ii murders in the Batticaloa Administrative district. But there is reason to believe that more than that number of killings occurred in Karativu alone, where the Sinhalese—many of them migrant fishermen—were massacred. Men, women and children were pulled out of their homes— wailing, and screaming for mercy—and beaten, more often than not, to death. Houses were set ablaze and law officers were powerless. Meanwhile in other parts of the district houses were still blazing, looting was proceeding apace, and the search for victims was still on.

Many of the migrant fishermen in the area had left their homes earlier. What they had left behind was quickly grabbed and shared among the goondas. Some of this was discovered

later and a small-time politician who was found to have a sizeable stock of madhal, or home-spun fishing nets, in his house stated that he had taken all this under his roof for protection. In the Eravur area there were other incidents of goonda activity and in many cases both the police and the military were fired at when they attempted to intervene. In one instance, police and service personnel had to fire several rounds at a blood-thirsty crowd before they could rescue alive two men who had been set afire.

Despite Mr Bandaranaike's characteristic attitude of ignoring the presence of a monster in the hope that it would go away or fall dead of its own accord, the pressure for the declaring of a State of Emergency was rising overwhelmingly. The Governor-General had broken with convention to visit the Prime Minister at his Rosmead Place home in order to impress on him the need for firm, urgent action.

Between eight and ten o'clock that morning the situation all over the country, notably in Colombo district, Kurunegala, Polonnaruwa and the Batticaloa—Eravur area had deteriorated so badly that even the stoutest heart and most cynical mind could not possibly help quailing at the continuance of this barbarism. In Colombo Fort, Pettah and Colombo South the thugs ran amok, beating up people who wore their shirts over their vertis, Tamil fashion. They stopped pedestrians and passing cars looking for ear-ring holes in men's ears. It was impossible to disguise these marks of early parental affection and many Tamils paid dearly for this traditional feature.

When the goondas could not find any obvious distinguishing marks they used the ingenious device of testing people's race by asking them to read and explain a piece from a Sinhalese newspaper. Very few Tamils and—mirabile dictu!—very few Sinhalese, particularly of the English educated class, could pass this test and they were summarily dealt with for their ignorance of the official tongue.¹⁰

Emergency Declared

Shortly after noon on May 27, the Governor-General proclaimed that a State of Emergency had arisen in Ceylon. Several units of the army and navy were mobilized. Army units were rushed to Batticaloa district from Colombo and Diyatalawa where the Sinha regiment had just held its passing-out parade. Volunteers were called up for active service. A dusk to dawn curfew was clamped on the whole island.

The Government also took the bold step of proscribing the Federal Party and the Jatika Vimukti Peramuna, which were at the two extremes of the language conflict. It was a bold step, certainly, that had immediately beneficial results—but whether it was a wise one remains to be seen.

The rioters continued their battle in the streets. Fresh fires broke out in Wellawatte, Maradana and Pettah. Looting continued apace.

Gangs of hoodlums in the Ratmalana area appeared to be working according to a predetermined pattern. Thugs disguised as policemen went round Tamil houses warning the residents that the police could no longer guarantee their safety and advising them to take refuge in the police station. Nearly 10,000 people left their homes in terror. Then the 'policemen' returned, some now in mufti, others still in uniform, to ransack the empty houses. When they had left the scene, hard on their heels came the 'firing squads'. They came

in vehicles in twos and threes. A bottle of petrol was flung into the house. A stick of dynamite was despatched after it and another house was burning. Others, less efficiently equipped, zealously collected whatever furniture was left behind and used it as firewood to get the flames going.

Even after the emergency was declared the momentum of the island-wide riot continued. The afternoon papers and the radio announced the emergency, and the death penalty for looters, but a mob knows no fear.

From three o'clock that afternoon people rushed back into their homes. The navy took charge of the Pettah area, the army took over Maradana in Central Colombo and Wellawatte in the south, moving out towards the periphery of Colombo. The difficulty was that when a street was cleared of goondas it did not stay clear. Crazy and emboldened by their successes of the past few days they came creeping back to loot and burn as soon as the military had moved past.

By 4.30 p.m. the navy had cleared the Pettah of thugs. Sten guns mowed down goondas and stragglers. No account was taken of the number of deaths that afternoon.

A navy officer told me: 'We don't know how many were killed. If in the next few days the Pettah starts smelling of rotting flesh you will know it is not the meat market.'

By 6 p.m. it became clear that the Ceylon army and navy which had never before seen hot action except on newsreels, and had no Battle Honours to their credit, were doing a first-rate professional job. Their orders were to shoot and to shoot to kill.

In what the columnists call 'high political quarters' there was some doubt as to whether the military personnel would be willing to open fire on their own compatriots. No one knew how deep the communal bug had eaten into the armed services.

Within two hours of the call out the army and navy had proved that their morale, discipline and training were of a very high order. At 5 p.m. Queen's House—which had suddenly been converted into a G.H.Q.—received a message that Colombo had been cleared up to Wellawatte, Borella and Victoria Bridge. The fan-out had been relatively easy so far. Then the army began encountering some large-scale opposition, apparently organized, in the area between Manning Place and 42nd Lane, Wellawatte, where several rows of Tamil kiosks had been looted and burnt and some Tamil homes had been stoned and Tamil residents assaulted earlier.

The goondas held their ground even with the army advancing on them. Hand-made bombs and hand grenades were tossed at the soldiers, who, despite definite orders, were reluctant to shoot into the milling crowd of Sinhalese and Tamils who had gathered at the street corners to watch the activity.

Several 'warning' rounds were fired into the air, army and police personnel charged the crowd thrice and by 6 p.m. the area had been cleared.

Meanwhile Tamil homes in the area—notably down Vihare Lane, Hampden Lane and High Street—were receiving goonda treatment. Among the homes which were subjected to a

continuous barrage of stones was that of the Chief Clerk to the Superintendent of Police, Colombo. By the time the army reached the spot the hooligans had fled.

At night, several hours after the curfew order had come into force, a hand-bomb was thrown into a home at Ramakrishna Road where several Tamils had gathered for 'safety'. One Tamil received a direct hit on his arm which removed a large chunk of his flesh.

In the night, despite the curfew and military vigilance, new fires were started in Dehiwela and Ratmalana, particularly in the new housing estate where many new Tamil residents had come to settle during the past two years. Six brand-new houses blazed like giant pyres. Twenty-seven houses were gutted by fire.

The street battle was still raging when people began their regular trek to work. It was quieter at Vivekananda Lane Junction but goondas were still active and an army detachment was still under sporadic attack.

At Ratmalana, near the bus station, there was a pitched battle between the army under Colonel F. C. de Saram and hundreds of Sinhalese zealots fighting grimly on despite the hopelessness of their effort. Their fanaticism had been ignited by the death of a Sinhalese bus driver who, they claimed, had been killed during the night by a Tamil policeman's bullet. The search was on for a Tamil policeman and the drivers refused to ply the buses. Vehicles were stopped by the crowds who checked them for Tamil passengers. Tamils were pulled out forcibly and attacked. One Tamil lady had her ear lobes torn off because her attackers were in too much of a hurry to give her time to unscrew her ear-rings. A man displayed a long gash in his wrist made by the pin in his strap-buckle when the goondas tore his watch off him in their frenzied haste.

Meanwhile the morning plane from Jaffna had come in and, with it, a crop of five new rumours, hot from the unofficial mint, and all counterfeit. Sinhalese residents in Ratmalana told the drivers at the bus station that the Tamils had murdered hundreds of Sinhalese in Jaffna.

Police records show that up to that date Jaffna was still quiet and that, at this stage, no damage had been done to any Sinhalese there.¹¹ But a few Sinhalese residents who could afford the air fare had left Jaffna fearing reprisals—as indeed they might, for the tension was at snapping point.

During the night the navy had brought the Pettah into order. The goondas had moved on towards Maradana and Borella where there were still a few isolated incidents. The goondas displayed uncanny knowledge of people's movements and an almost incredible temerity. At 4 p.m. on May 28 outside the Galle Face Hotel where a society wedding was taking place, they singled out from many cars, a car belonging to a young Tamil wedding guest. In the presence of hundreds of people, armed policemen on duty and army patrols, they set this car ablaze with complete impunity.

Mercifully, the harbour was still free from arson and race-war. Miraculously the harbour labourers did not carry the war into the port area although many of them, as was discovered later when lists of thugs arrested were published, had joined in the looting and thuggery in the street battles.

The army took advantage of the opportunity to do some slum-clearance too. On 'top level' orders they indulged in official arson by burning down the whole row of shanties that disfigures the General Lake's Road. Politicians who would never have dared to clear them out by allowing the Municipality to impose the by-laws of the city were already tasting the advantages of dictatorship over democracy, the way they had understood and practised it.

Jaffna Reacts

Police sources are certain that while shops in Colombo were being looted, people assaulted and killed, and the Prime Minister was being pressed to advise the Governor-General to declare a State of Emergency, the whole of the Northern Province was still comparatively quiet. In some parts, mainly in the town of Jaffna itself, a few stragglers were still around—tar brushes and pots in hand—on the look-out for vehicles bearing the Sri number-plate, and there had, of course, been an increased tension in the atmosphere from the time that rumours of what was happening in the North Central Province started trickling through after May 22. The Sinhalese residents of the area, however, who had lived through the June '56 riots without encountering so much as a jeer, did not feel that either their lives or their property were in danger.

In fact one Sinhalese police officer who was stationed at Jaffna told me that when he spoke to some of his Sinhalese acquaintances and told them that there were some indications that what was happening in other parts of Ceylon might spread to the peninsula, they shrugged it off with a smile and reminded him that in 1956 they had been safer at Jaffna than they could have been anywhere else.

The change came on May 28. By then rumours of what had allegedly been done to Tamils in the south had come through. As with all rumours which were spread during this period, many of them were totally groundless. But nobody stopped to check them. And what finally unleashed the fury of the Tamils in Jaffna was the story—repeated in various forms by different people—of the fate of the Hindu Kovil and its incumbent at Panadura.

At street corners and in market squares the crowds began to gather. First they came in small batches of twos and threes, then in greater numbers. The petty local 'leaders' obviously found in this situation a golden opportunity for enhancing their authority. They proclaimed, in all seriousness, that it was their duty to avenge what had been done to their brothers and sisters in the south. The goondas in the crowd, always on the look-out for opportunities to display their prowess lucratively, agreed. The hunt for Sinhalese was on.

In one respect this set of outrages differed from what had gone before. No attempt was made to do bodily harm to the Sinhalese. They were told to leave their homes and their shops, once they proved to the satisfaction of the goondas—by producing their rent receipts—that the buildings which they occupied were owned by Tamils. Then their goods were dragged out on to the road, heaped up, and burnt. This was regarded by the Powers in Colombo as certain evidence that the rioting in the north was organized by some powerful behind-the-scenes interests. It certainly looked like that on what evidence there was at the time.

In Jaffna itself there was one ugly incident on May 29.

That evening a crowd of around 200 goondas were on the look-out for anything—just anything—to destroy.

Earlier they had done the round of homes occupied by Sinhalese; now they were in the heart of the town, boisterous, belligerent and restive but, apparently, with no victims on whom to vent their spleen.

Then they had an inspiration: they would destroy the Naga Vihare.

The idea caught on and the goondas marched on to the Naga Vihare, a Buddhist temple in the heart of Jaffna town which had often been used as a halt by pilgrims en route to the Nagadipa Vihare at Nainativu.

The goondas collected whatever weapons they could find on the way, but by the time they had had their initial stock of brickbats at the Temple the police were on the scene. They prevented a full-scale demolition of the Vihare, but were not in time to check an assault on its incumbent.

By the time the bhikku was removed to hospital he had a four-inch gash on his forehead and was severely bruised.

Later the goondas attempted to storm the hospital and the police opened fire. Nobody was killed.

On May 30, the disturbances took a slightly different turn when Government offices in Kayts and Valvettiturai were broken open, records destroyed and firearms stolen. This, coupled with the organized nature of the rioting, was built up by the Competent Authority into the Northern Rebellion, and it was announced off-the-record—at a press conference held on May 31—that there was a definite attempt in Jaffna to cause a breakdown of the civil administration, to destroy Government property and to establish a separate State.

As a matter of fact, the explanation was much simpler. In Kayts and Valvettiturai smuggling has been, for generations, the natural occupation of the people. The only offices attacked were those of the Customs—the smugglers were making hay! They were destroying for all time their dossiers and the weapons which the Government might use against them.

On the same day, at Kayts, some Government boats were destroyed. And then occurred one of the foulest and most provocative examples of goonda activity in the course of the riots. The Buddhist Temple of Nagadipa stood on the island of Nainativu, eight miles from Kayts. According to hoary legend Nagadipa has direct connections with the life of Gautama Buddha. In the old days only a shrine existed, but by dint of devoutness the temple had grown to sizeable proportions. Isolated as it was, and lacking financial support from a steady flow of pilgrims, the temple had still managed to survive and preserve its atmosphere of quiet holiness.

In commemoration of the Buddha Jayanti celebrations the Burmese Government had given to the Nagadipa Vihare a magnificent bronze-alloy statue. This image had been taken round various centres in the south so that as many persons as possible could see it before enshrinement in Nainativu.

One afternoon a gang of goondas, suspected to be among those who had earlier destroyed the boats at Kayts (presumably with a view to preventing any chance of being pursued by the police) set out on the eight-mile trip to Nainativu.

There they acted swiftly and skilfully. This act of desecration was, without a doubt, premeditated and planned. With vicious zeal they set about destroying the temple. They dynamited the dagoba, snapping off the tapering top section. They burnt every building except one, an outhouse. A small detachment of the gang wreaked their anger on the Buddha image from Burma. They hauled it off the pedestal and carried it away with them. Perhaps it proved too heavy for them to carry across to the mainland for display as a trophy, because it never reached Kayts. With what surely must have been demoniacal purpose, the goondas sawed through the neck, one arm and some fingers of the image. Their intent was to damage it beyond repair in case it should be recovered later. Then they tossed the truncated body and its smaller parts into the sea at various points.

The news of this dangerous devilry reached Colombo two days later. It was an act of such gross vandalism, with such huge potentialities for rousing the already fermenting South into foaming anger, that the Governor-General and the army command were loath to believe their ears. As each hour passed they expected the story to spread through the Buddhist population, sparking a massacre. But the strict secrecy which had to be maintained until the military had really dug in and established themselves as a formidable force throughout the island was somehow kept unbroken. The Minister of Transport and Works, Maitripala Senanayake, was sent to Nainativu to investigate. He confirmed the earlier reports: destruction was almost complete.

The incumbent bhikku of Nagadipa was invited to Colombo and told that the temple would soon be restored to better shape than it was in before the goonda attack. The bhikku maintained a dignified and discreet silence. The Public Works Department was instructed to start restoration work at once. By the end of July a brand-new temple had risen from the debris of the old edifice. The navy undertook the almost hopeless task of salvaging the image. They had no clue as to where it was dumped but, miraculously, they found the spot. As expected, the damage was irreparable.

With the assistance of the Burmese Ambassador, the Governor-General was able to secure a replica of the destroyed image from Burma. It was brought to Ceylon in early August as a gift of 'relics' from the Burmese navy to the Ceylon navy.

The story of the destruction of Nagadipa and the way it was rebuilt in eight weeks will weave itself into Buddhist legend in the years to come. But when the tension dies, people who relate the story will forget its most significant aspect: if its destruction had not been kept a tight secret, all the vigilance and guns of the armed services would not have prevented a wholesale massacre of the Tamils.

Mob fury was then directed at individuals, one of whom, Mr Pathirana, was a resident of Jaffna of very long standing, known and respected by all his neighbours to whom he had always been helpful. He owned the house in which he lived— and on May 31 the mob destroyed it. They then took his car in procession to the esplanade and set fire to it. By the evening of May 31, however, the Sinhalese had all been moved to safety, the belongings of almost all Sinhalese residents had been destroyed, and there was nothing left for the hoodlums to work on.

A few sporadic attempts were made to attack single policemen, but when the army, under Colonel F. C. de Saram, reached Jaffna, the whole peninsula was quiet again. The army settled in for the Occupation of Jaffna.

The Padaviya Panzers

Two days after the emergency was proclaimed an epic battle took place in the Anuradhapura district. It is likely to be remembered long after the horror and shame of the riots of '8 are forgotten. To appreciate the story fully it is necessary to get some idea of the character of the area in which this event occurred.

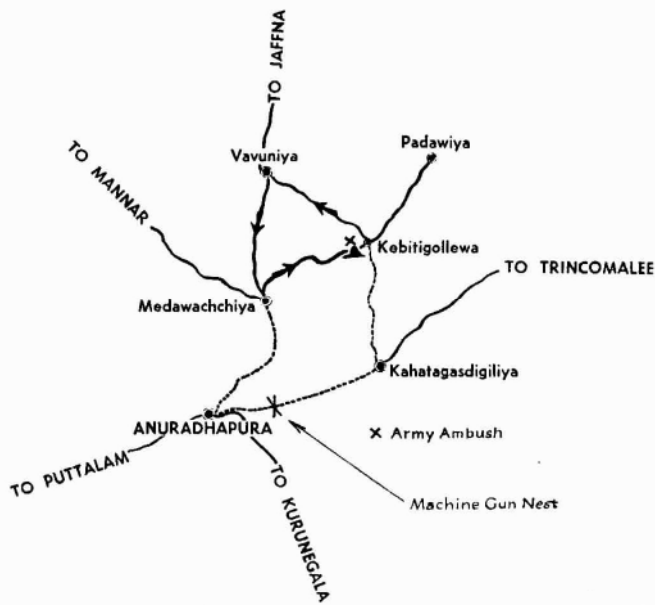
The story begins in Padaviya where Government works have recently been concentrated to speed up settlement: a place very like a Wild West pioneer colony in a cowboy film. There were the settlers, the hired labourers and the Government officials. There was no real community life, no law except that of the Jesse James school. There was no middle class to speak of—no steady, moderating influence except the farmers who had been settled longest and who had already got themselves a valuable stake in the soil.

On May 30 the labourers employed by the Land Development and Irrigation Department at Padaviya, and the newly-arrived squatters in the allotments, could no longer contain themselves. One of the hot-heads made a self-denunciatory speech: 'Comrades,' he said. 'We are not men. We are women. We have not yet shed a drop of Tamil blood although our countrymen are suffering at their hands.' It did not take long for the blood lust to get a hold on the 'Padaviya Panzers', as they were to become.

A relative quiet had settled on Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura since the emergency was declared and there were already signs of normal human relations being restored. On May 28 and May 29 Sinhalese people had been seen bringing exhausted Tamils out of hiding into the refugee camps on bicycle pillions and in carts. Government Agent Aluwihare had apparently decided it was safe to leave Polonnaruwa and go to his 'substantive' station at Anuradhapura to check on the situation there.

In the station there was stranded a refugee train carrying 2,000 Tamils fleeing from Colombo. The drivers had refused to go further north into 'Tamil country', where a derailment had occurred during the last strikes. In addition there was the refugee camp at the Kachcheri where 600 Tamils were being looked after. The Government Agent, the army and the police officers were very anxious to prevent bloodshed in the Holy City of Anuradhapura and so far their luck had held. Two army units, one under Major Eardley McHeyzer, the other under Major M. O. Gooneratne, were keeping guard on the town, to be on the safe side.

But there were still thugs in Anuradhapura town, and they had made a pact with the Padaviya Panzers that they would, as soon as the time was propitious, join forces and sack the town. Around midmorning of May 30 the restless labourers at Padaviya decided that the time had come. Or perhaps it was prearranged—no one will ever know the real truth. They intimidated the Irrigation Engineer with threats of butchering his family and secured the keys to the dynamite magazine. From the Land Development Officer they wrested the keys of the petrol dump.



They packed the dynamite into empty kerosene and cigarette tins. The cigarette tins were to be used as medium range hand-grenades. The kerosene tins were potential block-busters. The Panzers were preparing for a full-scale battle and would go far afield to wage it! Their staff work was uncannily thorough. They filled a bowser full of water and another full of petrol. They filled up the tanks of seven trucks and two giant Euclids. One truck was loaded with hand-bombs, the kerosene-tin block-busters, katties, knives, grass-cutting blades, home-made swords, elephant guns, ancient matchlocks and some modern shot-guns.

Six trucks were jam-packed with men. The two Euclids led the procession as this weird mechanized unit set out to sack Anuradhapura. About 600 managed to find room in the vehicles, and many more set out gaily on foot, shouting slogans and shrill war-cries. Their enthusiasm vanished before two miles were behind them. But the mechanized army, oddly reminiscent of Hannibal's bizarre forces, persisted.

They did not take the direct road to Anuradhapura. The leaders of this mechanized Panzer Division were ex-servicemen who had seen some action abroad. They obviously knew the drill and had a shrewd practical knowledge of field strategy. They took the Padawiya—Kebitigollewa—Vavuniya Road, instead of the direct road to Medawachchiya, burning what Tamil kiosks they came across on the way. At Vavuniya they turned south taking the Medawachchiya—Anuradhapura Road. The Government Agent of Vavuniya telephoned a frantic message to Anuradhapura that they were heading for the town.

The rough sketch-map ... will help to illustrate the story. Government Agent Aluwihare left Major Guneratne in charge of the refugees and with Major McHeyzer and his unit of fifty men rushed north towards Medawachchiya to meet the Padawiya Panzers before they reached Anuradhapura.

As they were charging along the Anuradhapura—Medawachchiya Road they had a hunch that the Panzers would feint again: that they would turn off at Medawachchiya to Kebitigollewa, go south to Kahatagasdigiya and west again to Anuradhapura while the army was chasing them round the perimeter of the quadrilateral. Major McHeyzer turned back towards Anuradhapura, took the turn towards Kahatagasdigiya and placed a machine-gun nest to ambush the Panzers should they come that way. Then he returned through Anuradhapura towards Medawachchiya, in case they were coming by that route. At Medawachchiya the defenders found their hunch had been right. The Panzers had indeed turned left and were moving towards Kebitigollewa for their three-sided dash for Anuradhapura.

The army met the Panzers halted at a point a few miles short of Kebitigollewa. They had run into a police patrol of five, headed by Inspector Daya Ranasinghe.¹² Ranasinghe held the Panzers up with five rifles, ordered them to dismount and held them covered, hoping and praying that something would turn up to save the situation. He knew very well that he and his men could not expect to stall an army of blood-thirsty hoodlums for long. But the shooting at

Polonnaruwa had taken the gleam off their Apey Aanduwa complex and their sense of discretion was now more dominant than their self-assurance.

When the army arrived Major McHeyzer ordered his men to surround the rebels and take them into custody for violating at least half a dozen Emergency Laws. But when the soldiers began to circle round them, the Panzers tried to make a bolt for it through the jungle. A brief burst from a Bren stopped the stampede. When it was all sorted out it was found that eleven men had been killed and eighteen injured. The army took 343 prisoners and brought them, in the trucks they had stolen, to Anuradhapura. The thugs who had planned to enter Anuradhapura as conquerors were brought in as prisoners.

The army halted at about 7.30 p.m. in the bazaar while Government Agent Aluwihare sent word to the Magistrate and the coroner. While waiting for them he noted that the curious crowd was becoming restive. Noticing the local thugs among them he warned them that if they were found guilty of any looting, arson or violence they would be given the same treatment.

Later this warning was to be interpreted as a piece of sadistic barbarism on Aluwihare's part. He had not realized that while he was talking some men had peeped into the truck carrying the eleven bodies of the men who had been shot. The politicians told the story of the brutal manner in which Aluwihare had exposed corpses in the bazaar and intimidated innocent people. As the story became more embellished they came to believe that the army had, without cause and without remorse fired at a peaceful party of unarmed people who were going home minding their business.

The cover story of the Padaviya Panzers was indeed plausible. The men who had escaped had run bleating to the politicians. Their version of the story was that they were going home peacefully after a brief tour of Vavuniya when they met a police party. The police 'requested' them to rest awhile on the rocks, smoke and chew the fat. The army, said the police party, had expressed a desire to discuss one or two matters with them and would appreciate it if they waited for them in that spot. The army arrived with the Government Agent, Mr Deryck Aluwihare, who ordered the army to fire without giving them a chance to explain their innocence. They were squatting peacefully on the rocks, they insisted, when the army fired. Hence, they explained, the blood smears on the rocks. The first version was the one that was given official recognition by the Governor-General. The reader can make a shrewd guess as to which version the politicians preferred.

General Oliver

The first casualty in the emergency was the national press. Since the riots started the press had reported the incidents all over the country with care and discretion. Editors exercised their own 'censorship'—on the principle that while it was the duty of the press to record events of the day, they were morally obliged to 'play down' or, if necessary, 'miss' stories which, if published, were certain to exacerbate communal tensions further and endanger the safety of the State. In fact, up to this moment, the newspapers had displayed a greater sense of responsibility and a keener appreciation of the state of the country than the politicians who were flapping their hands helplessly and hoping that the chaos they saw round them would sort itself out. With the announcement of the emergency came the simultaneous imposition of press censorship and the appointment of an Information Officer as Competent Authority for this purpose.

Two hours later the editors of the newspapers were invited to a conference by M. J. Perera, the Competent Authority. He met them at the head of the stairs and by way of an opening gambit he pointed through the window at the neon sign atop the Grand Oriental Hotel building which read: '2500 Years of Buddhism'. He remarked: 'Two thousand five hundred years of Buddhism—and see what we've come to!' One of the editors replied: 'Two thousand five hundred years of Buddhism and two and a half years of Bandaranaike!' If the Competent Authority was amused, he did not show it.

'Gentlemen,' he observed as the conference began, 'I have been appointed Competent Authority but I must confess that I feel quite incompetent to deal with journalists. 'I propose,' he continued, 'to delegate my authority to you so that you, as responsible journalists, can impose your own censorship.'

This seemed an ideal formula in theory but the editors present, accustomed to the vagaries of politicians' moods and their talent for breaking mutual faith, would have none of it. Their attitude was that the very fact that the Government had decided that press censorship was necessary was proof of their unwillingness to trust the editors' discretion and that in a competitive business like newspaper publishing they could not accept the responsibility for censorship.

They argued that in the emergency they would be completely at the mercy of the whims and prejudices of the politicians managing the country if the discretion was left to them. It was pointed out, with considerable cogency, that any voluntary censorship on the part of the press could only be possible if there were no censorship regulations simultaneously operating as a threat. The Government could not have it both ways.

The Competent Authority felt that he was incompetent to settle this issue at his level. The entire conference walked across to Queen's House for a man-to-man talk with the Governor-General.

That conference will live in my memory for a long while. It was farce at its most accomplished. From the moment we entered Queen's House the comic unreality of it began to impress itself upon me. At the gate the sentry challenged us but was ignored as though he were a street urchin begging for coins.

We were a motley crowd, perhaps the most informally-clad visitors ever to enter those marble halls. We were met at the door by a glamorous aratchi who wore a quaint little tortoise-shell comb in his hair. He passed us on to a resplendent senior aratchi who wore a fancy waistcoat of a more intricate design. He wore his hair in a bun and a mantilla-comb of enormous dimensions ornamented his coiffure. The ludicrousness of these costumes and the old-world characters who wore them with such peacock pride had never struck me so forcibly as now when the whole country was in upheaval outside the cold, formal, out-of-this-world luxury of Queen's House.¹³

Upstairs, as we were ushered into the air-conditioned 'office' room of the protagonist of the great tragicomedy, H.E. the Governor-General, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, C.G.M.G., KCVO K B.E., was already trying out his lines.

As the curtain went up he was 'discovered', as the playwrights say, sitting at a desk with six telephones and no papers on it. He held a telephone to each ear. He did not even look up as we entered. We stood inside the door as he told the mouthpiece of one telephone—'sh-sh-sh-shoot them.'

That settled, he cradled that telephone and said into the mouthpiece of the other: 'O.E.G. here. Clear them out even if you have to sh-sh-sh-shoot them.' The second telephone clicked back on its cradle.

I was definitely impressed. In two short sentences, one of the most polished players ever to bstride the public stage had created the atmosphere he needed for the drama that was to unfold.

I watched silently, marvelling at the facility with which Sir Oliver had slipped into the old 'O.E.G.' role which he had played with such extravagant distinction as Civil Defence Commissioner during World War Two. The only difference was that he was no longer plain Mr O. E. Goonetilleke, Civil Defence Commissioner, but 'General' Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, Supreme Commander of the Armed Services of Ceylon and of the Civil Liberties of the people.

Having delivered his two opening lines, Sir Oliver rose and walked round the table towards us, the look of stern determination still on his face. Then, when he was at a hand-shake's distance, the tight look was peeled off and that completely convincing and completely simulated smile cracked his face from east to west. He pumped a round of hands, with special words of greeting for old acquaintances and more special words of welcome for the strangers.

As soon as the conference began it became clear that the liberal interpretation of the press censorship regulations given to us by the Information Officer was very far from Sir Oliver's understanding of them. His words, which I report as nearly verbatim as I can give them, were:

No news of any incidents or about any aspect of the present situation. No editorials, no comment, no columns, no photographs or cartoons of any kind on the emergency without reference to me.

It was pointed out that such harsh censorship had never been imposed even during the worst days of the war—in Ceylon or in Britain during the Blitz.

Sir Oliver's response to that was to shunt the subject on to another line but close enough to convey his meaning:

I advise you to read up the Detention Laws under the Emergency Regulations. Detention without trial. No writs of habeas corpus, no bail, no .

He broke off with a sunny apology, to make another telephone call. All we heard was: 'Maurice de Mel. Not Royce. Maurice. Is that Maurice? 42nd Lane, Wellawatte? Clear the place. If necessary sh-shshoot.'

By this time not even the most obtuse among us needed a diagram to know which way things were going. But Sir Oliver couldn't resist making the point clear by telling us: 'Gentlemen.

One favour. One personal request. When you report the news in future please don't say that I am running the sh-shshow. I don't want all kinds of jealousies to come up, you know. . . That made it official. Sir Oliver was running the show.

As we rose to go Sir Oliver, smiling beatifically, improved the shining hour by throwing away a loaded line with the grace and timing of an Olivier: 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'bear with me for a few days. A few weeks. Maybe months. Then you can call me a rn-rn-murderer if you like.'

As we went back to our offices we knew that the emergency regulations had already resulted in two major casualties. The first, as I have said, was the freedom of the press. The second casualty was the civil liberties of the people and their right to know the truth about the way in which the Government they had elected was dealing with the national crisis.

It is difficult to find a parallel for the harshness of the censorship imposed on the national press of Ceylon. Even during the Battle of Britain, when the British people, almost overpowered by a well-prepared and well-equipped Luftwaffe, were fighting back with their knees and their knuckles for their very existence, the press had never been gagged as tightly. News which was likely to create 'alarm and despondency' was left out and reports of troop, naval and air force movements were necessarily censored. But comment was always free. The British press and the reading public were still free to comment on and criticize the conduct of the war by the Government.

Ethereal Buccaneers

Queen's House was now the venue of the daily press conference and, although the impression was given that the conference was being held by the Information Officer, it was Sir Oliver Goonetilleke himself who conducted it. The Information Officer was but a civil service cipher in the proceedings—a role which that officer, I am sure, much preferred to the one for which he had been billed.

From the first day of the censorship the public was treated to the finest examples of the kind of pre-fabricated news that they will assuredly get if the press is ever nationalized. The news given by the Competent Authority had not even a nodding acquaintance with the facts. Censors must, when the occasion demands, keep news out—but the Competent Authority went ten times better and altered the facts to suit the purposes of the Government. For instance, a foreign press correspondent in Ceylon filed a cable referring to the fact that a quarter of the population of Ceylon is Tamil speaking. The 'one-fourth' was deliberately altered by the Competent Authority to read 'one-sixth'.¹⁴

The Government was anxious after the first day or two to shift the focus of interest from the events in the Sinhalese areas to Jaffna and Batticaloa. The news was therefore carefully but crudely twisted to suit this purpose. The 'news' breaks from the Northern and Eastern Provinces were given exclusive prominence.

The headlines read:

Substantial Increases of Military strength in Batticaloa area, N.P. (Ceylon Observer—May 30).

No Air Trips to the North (Times of Ceylon—May 30).

Tighter Security Measures in North and East.

On May 31 the Competent Authority reported. 'The situation in the Northern Province is now becoming hourly the chief problem of the Authorities, with a growing suspicion that just as the secret wave-length and calling sign of the police radio has fallen into the hands of a widespread organization, the police secret cipher is also in the hands of the same organization.'

Obviously a Master was at work. The mixture of fact and fiction was expertly dispensed. At the press conference Sir Oliver was asked why this pirate radio could not be tracked down.

His answer was: 'Notice of that question, please. We are on the verge of locating it.' People spoke freely of the pirate radio and the uncanny knowledge displayed by the 'secret organization' that was operating it. A couple of innocent radio hams had to surrender their equipment. But it soon became clear that no one had actually heard this radio station.

Everyone who talked about it knew someone else who had heard it but they themselves had no direct experience. And, as it must happen, a rich crop of theories sprouted on the false ground prepared by the rumour-mongers. Sir Oliver, enjoying the melodrama of his role, gave official impetus to the pirate radio theory by 'appealing' to the public through the press conference to demonstrate their patriotism by refusing to listen in to the pirate radio.

Like a police commissioner in an Eric Ambler thriller he spoke with calculated reticence about the breaking of the secret police code and the secret wave-length by these ethereal buccaneers.

The theories grew multifold. Some said it was a short-wave station, others said it was the same wave-length as Radio Ceylon. Some said that the radio was operated off a Russian ship in the Bay of Bengal, others said it was a British vessel engaged in the fleet manoeuvres off the coast of Trincomalee. Some said that the pirate radio had been located in the Flower Road area; others claimed that it had been traced to a spot near the Galle Face Hotel. Some spoke of a Russian hide-out in the Katukurunda area where a transmitter could easily be secreted; others were certain that it was the Voice of America indulging in a clever game of ventriloquism.

Some located it in the Hendala area where a relative of a Communist boy has his country cottage and 'work-shed'; others were certain it was a mobile transmitter.

The truth of the matter was that the pirate radio was an imaginative masterpiece, used by Sir Oliver for the specific purpose of making the emergency 'big' enough to call for really 'big' and unprecedented counter measures. Already Members of Parliament were showing alarm at the ferocity of the military activity in the country. Moreover the possibility of having to 'get tough' in Jaffna if reprisals began there on a mass scale had occurred to Sir Oliver. Hence the big build-up of the atmosphere of conspiracy and 'foreign intervention'.

Hence the story of the technological skill and uncanny omnipresence and omniscience of the radio privateers.

There was, no doubt, another consideration in Sir Oliver's mind. He knew that as long as the press was fed with sufficient quantities of raw meat it would be so preoccupied that it would not protest much about censorship regulations or start asking awkward questions about the suppression of civil liberties in the country.

It is an interesting speculation to consider whether, if the heat of the early days of the emergency had continued, Sir Oliver would have dragged the Martians and Flying Saucers into Ceylon's troubles in the role of Arch Conspirators.

By the second week of June, the pirate radio was already a wispy memory. But what about those who still may claim that they had heard a radio transmitter which was definitely not Radio Ceylon? The C.I.D. answer: Very possibly it was the police radio-network on to which people had unwittingly tuned.

Governor's Rule

As soon as the emergency was proclaimed the political complex of Ceylon underwent a complete transformation. The first significant evidence of this was the virtual abdication of the legislative authority in the first week of the emergency. The Governor-General made this abundantly clear on May 27—three hours after the emergency was announced—when he told pressmen, 'Please don't publish the fact that I am running the show.'

The events that followed proved that such indeed was the case. The legal aspect of this situation must be stated briefly in order to appreciate what was happening. Under the laws of Ceylon the Governor-General's role in an emergency is that he proclaims a State of Emergency on the advice of the Head of the Government. This act has the effect of shifting authority temporarily to the Governor-General but, under the law, he is obliged to delegate these powers back to the Prime Minister and his Ministers. The Prime Minister is then armed with extraordinary powers in order to take action to cope with the emergency.

The analogy of what took place in Britain when that country was in a state of war is illuminating. The King proclaimed a State of War on the advice of the Prime Minister who was then given back the authority to carry on the war. Thus Sir Winston Churchill who took over from Mr. Neville Chamberlain was de jure as well as de facto in full control of the conduct of the war. He gave the orders and he shouldered the responsibility for winning the war and for the mistakes of his command.

In Ceylon a curious phenomenon occurred. The Prime Minister, for reasons never openly stated by him anywhere, took the unprecedented step of passing the buck back to the Governor-General—thus making Sir Oliver Goonetilleke virtual ruler of Ceylon. Although his reasons were not stated, they are not far to seek. The first and obvious reason was that Mr. Bandaranaike felt inadequate to deal with a situation which could not be tackled with words, however eloquent and polished they might be.

The time for decision and action had arrived. Mr. Bandaranaike, like all three previous Prime Ministers of Ceylon who had increasingly learnt to lean more and more on Sir Oliver whenever they were in trouble, particularly towards the last days of their tenancy of Temple Trees, was not slow to recognize the advantage to him of letting Sir Oliver bring the country under control. Sir Oliver's experience as a public servant, Minister, diplomat, negotiator, War Councillor and Civil Defence Commissioner during World War Two fitted him magnificently for the job of handling an island-wide emergency.

The personal qualities which had made him a success in all his previous undertakings—his razor-sharp mind, his adeptness at bluffing his way through the stickiest mess, his ability to

visualize the opponent's manoeuvres three moves ahead, his sweeping cynicism, his blasé attitude to scruples which would baulk another man over weighted with conscience, qualified him eminently for the job.

There was also a keener and more subtle reason for Mr Bandaranaike's uncharacteristic self—effacement. His experience of tide watching¹⁵ has given him a sharp prescience about the force and direction of the next wave of popular emotion. He realized that the administration of the Emergency Regulations, and the military activity necessary to bring the extremists under control, while giving a sense of temporary relief throughout the country, would inevitably cause a strong reaction among the people - both Sinhalese and Tamils.

As most of the disorders were in predominantly Sinhalese districts and since more Sinhalese were likely to be jailed, beaten tip or killed by the armed services, the reaction from the Sinhalese against the Government was bound to be powerful. It is even possible - indeed even probable, to judge by Mr. Bandaranaike's previous actions - that he expected the communal conflict to become deflected into a war between the Sinhalese Buddhists and the Christians. The Prime Minister had decided to allow the Governor General to take the spotlight so that he could also take the rap.

Sir Oliver Goonctilleke, an old fox himself, was quite aware that when the day of reckoning came he would be called to answer by the Prime Minister. This was what he had in mind when he told the press 'Gentlemen, hear with me for a few weeks. 'Then you can call mc a murderer if you like.' But he was gambler enough to depend on the outside chance of escaping intact and if possible of doing well for himself out of the situation.

He had also sufficient love for his country and enough personal conceit to realize that he was the man of the hour and that lie alone among Ceylon's public men was equipped to cope with civil disorder on a massive scale.

Mr Bandaranaike's instinct was perfectly right. The repercussions to the military control of the country and the punitive treatment of the rioters and trouble makers in the Sinhalese districts built up within four weeks to formidable proportions.

Evidence of Conspiracy

The Government party was thrown into absolute confusion during the riots. Its members were sensible of the responsibility of restoring order, whatever the political cost. One of the younger M.P.s—Mr Pani Illangakoon of Weligama—made a rousing speech in which he told the Prime Minister, 'Let us govern or get out!'

This was the mood among many members of Parliament who were fed up with the vacillation and volubility which had characterized MEP rule for over two years. But as politicians interested in retaining their seats and being returned to power at the next election should there be one, they were unwilling to sacrifice the goodwill of the communalists among their voters. Many of them, who had suddenly and quite unexpectedly found themselves M.P.s, could not face the thought of being flung back into obscurity and relative penury once again.

Confronted with this personal problem they cowered in Colombo waiting for the situation to crystallize in one form or another before they could make up their minds about the direction in which to move. One Cabinet Minister risked a quick visit to his constituency and regretted

his rashness. The Government Agent had to provide him with an armed escort to save him from the angry crowds of his onetime political supporters who now clamoured for his blood. Their cry was: 'We did not send you to represent us in Parliament to take the side of the Tamils against us. The forces of the Government are massacring the Sinhalese and protecting the Tamils.'

Government party men huddled together at the M.P.s' hostel and in their Colombo homes, terrified at the prospect of returning to their electorates. Not knowing what had hit them, and not daring to probe into their consciences in case they should discover the culprits within themselves, they turned to finding suitable scapegoats. The great question of this period became: 'Who was at the bottom of the communal riots?'

The Governor-General and the Prime Minister were not taking others into their confidence. News trickled out from Queen's House that the Governor-General had announced, off-the-record at a press conference, that the riots had not been spontaneous. What he said was: 'Gentlemen, if any of you have an idea that this was a spontaneous outburst of communalism, you can disabuse your minds of it. This is the work of a Master Mind who has been at the back of people who have planned this carefully and knew exactly what they were doing. It was a time-bomb set about two years ago which has now exploded.'

Speculation snowballed. The Right-Wing elements within the MEP were inclined to believe that Moscow had engineered the riots by remote control through local agents. Police and army intelligence reports from Batticaloa, Matara and Colombo had pointed to this possibility. Rumour had bruited it about that the Ceylon Air Force had succeeded in locating the pirate radio in the Russian Embassy at Flower Road.

The Rightists in the Government were excited about the possibility of the Communist Party being banned. Naïvely they hoped that this would provide a cover-all explanation which would acquit them of their own responsibility and at the same time force the Prime Minister to make a complete break with Mr Philip Gunawardene and the Left. Police reports of a Communist conspiracy were, in fact, becoming so positive that the Governor-General even sought advice from the Attorney-General about the legal aspect of a raid he was thinking of ordering on the headquarters of the Communist Party. One of the Communist Party branch offices in Colombo was actually raided—but, apart from the discovery of some articles claimed as loot, there was nothing conclusive to implicate the Communists or the Russian Embassy.

In their wild scramble for 'evidence' of a Communist conspiracy they even attributed the second train derailment at Batticaloa to the local Communists. Why had the Communists done this? To distract the attention of the public from their pathetic failure to break the Employers' Federation in the CTUF strike! This divertissement theory gained rapid currency. The Prime Minister was kept constantly briefed by the Governor-General about the police and army intelligence reports suggesting complicity on the part of the Communists and the Russian Embassy in Colombo.

A certain amount of force was given to this line of speculation by an editorial in the Singapore Standard of May 3 which directly pointed an accusing finger at the Soviet Ambassador in Ceylon, Mr. V. Yakovlev:

"There is also another factor in Ceylon's present chaotic state of which most people in that island are probably unaware. It will interest them to know that the chief Kremlin Emissary in Ceylon is the same man who was responsible for recommending to his Communist bosses the bloody purge of Poland and Hungary. This revelation will show the people of Ceylon the danger that lies in their midst."

But Mr Bandaranaike was disinclined to accept intelligence reports at their face value. In fact, as we shall see, he had his own private theory about the culprits and the Communist Party was not an integral part of it.

The Left Wingers, for their part, were equally naïve. Their candidate for guilty knowledge about the communal riots was their long-time enemy, the United National Party which had formed the previous Government. The Prime Minister, too, gave out vague hints that he had convincing evidence of a UNP conspiracy against national harmony and racial peace. And indeed there was some circumstantial evidence forthcoming during the riots that appeared—at least on the face of it—to vindicate this suspicion. The first piece of 'evidence' connecting the UNP with this crime against the nation was the publication of certain inflammatory pamphlets directed against the Tamils and Premier Bandaranaike's proposal for enacting legislation to ensure the reasonable use of Tamil.

These pamphlets appeared under the signature of the printer who produced the UNP Journal and its Sinhalese edition, *Siyarata*, Sirisoma Ranasinghe. As the Prime Minister told Parliament in the course of his address on the State of the Nation on June 24, Ranasinghe had visited the areas worst affected by the riots shortly before the trouble started. Moreover Ranasinghe was known to have been a close associate of J. R. Jayawardene, the UNP stalwart who has been hated, distrusted and feared most by the Left politicians.

Soon after the emergency was proclaimed Ranasinghe was arrested and jailed. J. R. Jayawardene made the suspected link firmer by visiting him in remand prison and trying to bail him out. Another reason for the suspicion that fell on the UNP was the reports that came in from the Trotskyites in the Badulla area who, having been told that many of the Sinhalese rioters were UNP men, assumed that the UNP was solely responsible for the chaos in the country.

And when P. Nadesan, the former Private Secretary of Colonel Sir John Kotelawala (the former Prime Minister), publicized in the press the news that the Gallant Colonel had decided to return home within two days of the announcement, Premier Bandaranaike saw red—or more accurately, green, the colour of the UNP flag. Angrily he told his friends that Sir John was coming back, 'trying to do a de Gaulle on Ceylon'.

The Prime Minister's wrath was so widely gossiped about that Sir John's former subordinates and hangers-on who had invited him to come home so that they themselves (many of them Tamils) could feel safer, hurriedly called Sir John at his home in Kent and begged him to cancel his trip. In fact they were only just in time to prevent a major 'incident', because the Prime Minister, on seeing the notice of Sir John's imminent return in the newspapers, gave a curt order to External Affairs Defence Secretary, Gunasena de Zoysa, to get the Ceylon High Commissioner's Office in London to impound Sir John's passport.

At first the Communist Party theory and the United National Party theory contended for general acceptance. Soon, however, the theory of the UNP's guilt became less plausible.

People realized that if the UNP had indeed created mass riots of that intensity and scale—it must then be still a great power in the land. This was a conclusion that the Left Wing was loath to accept. But their ingenuity triumphed. When Right-Wing conjecture linked the Communist Party and the Russian Embassy as partners in the crime, the Left Wing retaliated by bringing together the UNP and the Americans, as they were fond of doing in the old days. These theories were now sufficiently embellished and extended on an international scale to explain away such awkward questions as, ‘Is there any Ceylonese with the technological knowledge to construct and operate a short-wave radio transmitter without detection?’ and ‘Who in Ceylon is capable of breaking the police code and secret call sign?’

The Premier Waves his Wand

By June 3, when the Government Parliamentary Group met to assess the situation, their attitudes had crystallized in some definite form. Almost every one of the members knew the depths to which the prestige of the Government had tumbled since the emergency. All over the Sinhalese areas, wherever people had been roused by communal leaders and by the rumours of Tamil atrocities, the charge was that the Government was using the army to murder Sinhalese instead of to quell the Tamils, as it should have done.

When, therefore, the Government members of Parliament met on June 3 many of them knew their line. They had to find a scapegoat to offer to the Sinhalese whose communal passions had been churned up by the riots.

Prime Minister Bandaranaike obviously did not relish the idea of facing this meeting—a reluctance which had come on him perhaps for the first time since his triumphant election. There was too much to explain. There was much he could not explain.

He was afraid that the Leftist group would ask awkward questions about the Governor-General’s activities as Commander-in-Chief. But when the time came to go to the meeting he was in command of his self-assurance again. He knew that the groupers—like their marine counterparts—were only waiting for some kind of direction. He felt confident that his old magic wand—his bilingual tongue—would save him once more and help him to re-establish his party’s confidence in him. Besides, the press would not be there, or hanging around outside to pick up the story of the meeting from one of the members. And even if a good reporter got his story he was not in a position to publish it.

The Prime Minister decided that he would say precisely what he pleased and, more important than that, what would please his party.

The report below, written by one of the M.P.s present at the meeting and now published here verbatim, shows that even the events of the past month which would have shattered the nerves of any ordinary man had hardly touched the Prime Minister’s self-confidence and his hypnotic power over the back-benchers of the MEP:

‘I will run this country with my army and navy—I have taken certain steps to see that no extremists, either from the north or the south, will ever succeed in undermining this Government. Even if it means running this country for fifty years with my military forces, I am prepared to do so,’ Premier S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike told the Government Parliamentary Group at its emergency session yesterday.

‘Certain people seem to think that the Government is weak and they also expected it to collapse during the last few days. They have been proved wrong, the Government is firmer than ever before. I will show these people just exactly how strong the Government is—as I have proved during the last ten days,’ he said.

The Premier outlined the events that led to the State of Emergency being declared. He began with the Federal convention, the Polonnaruwa train hold-up, the Batticaloa derailment, and the shooting of the planter, Mr D. A. Seneviratne. The shooting, he said, had resulted in a number of other incidents in the rest of the country which finally resulted in his advising the Governor-General to declare a State of Emergency.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I have since then got complete control of the situation. All the forces which are against law and order, under the misguided conception that they could overthrow this Government, combined in the events during the last two weeks. The Government did not hesitate to act. We have succeeded in checking law breakers and hooligans.’

Thunderous applause greeted the Premier’s statement.

The M.P. for Gampaha, S. D. Bandaranayake, then said:

‘If the Government had banned the Federal Party, why did not the Government then take the next proper step and arrest the Federal leaders? Why haven’t Messrs Chelvanayakam and company been arrested? They should be behind bars instead of being free to do as they like! It is the Federalists who have planned this, in a well-organized way—the Government is weak and has brought itself into disrepute by not taking the proper action in arresting these leaders.’

Mr Bandaranaike: ‘It is not only the Federal Party which is responsible for activities against the Government. There are other forces that have worked against the Government.’

Mr S. D. Bandaranayake: ‘Who are they? Name them. We have a right to know! Why weren’t the Government Members of Parliament consulted and told the facts?’

Premier: (Angrily) ‘In a State of Emergency it is not possible to run to every M.P. and seek his advice.’

S. D. Bandaranayake: ‘Who are these “other forces” whom the Government has information about? These forces which are working against the Government?’

Premier: ‘There are certain matters which I cannot place before this group in fairness to the Governor-General. There are certain confidential matters that cannot be publicized now—and certain confidential steps that the Government has taken to protect itself against these same forces. Bear with me for a little while, and I will be ready to place these facts before you. I cannot disclose them to you. I am confident that you gentlemen will understand the position. But when this is all over, and you know the facts and the action I took, I tell you, you will have nothing but praise for me.’

The M.P. for Weligama, Pani Ilangakoon: ‘I also want to know why the Federal leaders have not been arrested. All over the country they are saying that the Government is weak. If we cannot govern, then let us get out. The Tamils have worked against us, they have plotted to overthrow this Government, with outside assistance. They will destroy us eventually. Before

that happens, I ask that the Tamils be settled once for all. I ask that they be told that Sinhala Only has come to stay—and they must submit. This Government has been too tolerant of these Tamils. The Sinhalese are the laughing stock in the country as a result of the Government's weak stand against the Tamils.'

Premier: 'Certainly the Federalists and other forces have planned to overthrow the Central Government and set up a separate administration in the east and the north. But I have thwarted that. Their attempts have been quelled. My military forces are now in the east and the north. There is military rule in these two provinces, each with a military governor, yes, I say they are military governors. With my army I will see that there is no repeated attempt to set up a different administration in these provinces.'

Several Members of Parliament then asked: 'All over the country they are saying that you have acceded to the Federal request for a Federal State by sending the Tamils back to the north and east. The whole country is under the impression that before long they will exist as separate Tamil Federal States.'

Premier: 'I will never allow that. I will never allow division of this country. What has happened is that the women and children who were living under very unsatisfactory and inconvenient conditions, have been sent, on their own wish, back to the north. That is all. There was no intention, nor is there any intention whatsoever, that the Government is helping, by this manner, the creation of a Federal or separate State.'

M.P. for Horana, Mr Sagara Palansuriya: 'The Tamils are gaining strength in all parts of the country where they are. Is this Government going to stand for this nonsense? The Sinhalese are in danger of being liquidated by them.'

An M.P. identified as M.P. for Hambantota, Lakshman Rajapakse: 'Destroy them!'

Premier: 'Who said that? Are you seriously thinking that the Tamils must be destroyed? This Government has no such intention. I am surprised that there is such talk and stranger still such talk from the M.P. for Hambantota, who is wedded to a Tamil, for better or for worse—isn't that so, Lakshman?'

Addressing the group sternly, the Premier said: 'It is my intention that every inhabitant in this country should live in peace and harmony. It is my intention that we should live together as one brotherhood. I tell you as Prime Minister, I would be inhuman if I did not work for this, and I tell you again, as Prime Minister, this Government will work towards this end. My mind has been engaged on this problem and I have no doubt at all that the Government Parliamentary Group will co-operate in the fulfilling of this task.'

'I will further tell you that I intend appointing Advisory Councils for the north and the east to begin with.'

'Meanwhile the military will stay there until such time that the Government is convinced that they should be withdrawn.'

The Minister of Education, W. Dahanayake: 'Do a de Gaulle. Do a de Gaulle.' Another burst of applause from Government back-benchers.

The Government Group then passed a vote of appreciation of the Premier on 'the tactful way the entire situation had been handled'.

The resolution was moved by W. Dahanayake and seconded by the M.P. for Nattandiya, Hugh Fernando.

Members of Parliament then asked why certain persons had been detained by the police on mere suspicion. Many of 'their men' had been either arrested or detained without any grounds at all. There was considerable argument on this matter and many of them demanded that these persons in whom they were interested be released.

They asked whether any more persons were to be detained in the interests of security. There was considerable dissatisfaction in their constituencies as a result of this action.

Further, they asked what assistance the Government would give to some of the constituents who had been injured during the recent events.

The Premier replied that a large number of persons had been rounded up and when the police were satisfied that they could be released, they would do so.

The third M.P. for Colombo Central, M. S. Themis, then complained that certain personnel in the army were 'throwing their weight about' and he asked that this be stopped.

Premier: 'The army is doing a splendid job under very difficult conditions. I dare say there may be such cases. It cannot be helped under the circumstances.'

There is a vast gulf, however, between the spoken word and the bleak fact. Premier Bandaranaike had certainly assuaged the apprehensions of many members of his party but there was that vast, amorphous, mute but powerful body of militant Sinhalese opinion which he could not appease so easily. No verbal sop would satiate this racial monster. It had to be offered raw meat. Preparations were accordingly made to put the Federalists under detention. This gesture alone, it was decided, would be big enough to assuage the outraged racial feelings of the Sinhalese extremists.

Federalists Detained

As the emergency went into its second week the number of incidents became negligible, but tension still prevailed. Underneath the superficial calm, made unearthly by the early curfew and the rigidity with which it was observed in Colombo and the suburbs, race feelings were still taut. There was general acclamation, however, for the efficiency and professional skill shown by the armed services in maintaining order.

The job they did looking after the refugees was magnificent. The refugee population in Colombo had grown to formidable proportions: 12,000 men, women and children of every imaginable walk of life were herded together in temporary camps - the bulk of them in Royal College. There were threats of an invasion by hoodlums in the night but the army threw such a heavy cordon round the place that the refugees were soon reassured.

The Marketing Department kitchens supplied the food. Voluntary organizations managed the general welfare of the refugees. Under Colonel C. P. Jayawardene's care the refugees had few complaints.

But race-hatred even sneaked into the refugee camps. One politician on a tour of inspection noticed a placard pinned over the door of a w.c. saying 'Men' in Tamil. He gave orders for the offending letters to be removed and the English equivalent to be substituted.

The social workers in Colombo too had caught the infection. Charitable organizations split down the middle of their membership when some of the philanthropic ladies forgot the time-honoured dictum that Charity, like Peace, is indivisible. They objected to helping out at the Tamil refugee camps, preferring to wait until the Sinhalese refugees arrived from Jaffna before they gave their milk of human kindness a chance to flow in liberal measure. There was even discrimination in the food given to the Tamil refugees and the Sinhalese refugees when they finally arrived from Jaffna.

The Prime Minister never set foot in the Royal College camp for Tamil refugees, but he was one of the first callers at the Thurstan Road camp which accommodated the Sinhalese evacuees from Jaffna. Perhaps it was bad politics for Sinhalese politicians to be seen commiserating with Tamil refugees. Perhaps if they knew what the Tamils in the camps were feeling they would have felt warmer towards them in their plight. Ironically it was much safer for a Sinhalese politician to walk into the Tamil camps than it was for Tamil politicians—of whatever hue they were.

The general reaction among the refugees whenever they saw a Tamil M.P. was: 'Look! See the mess you've got us into with your blundering ambitions. Why can't you leave us alone even now?'

One Tamil politician, well known for his powers of intercession at high levels, was so badly mobbed when he visited the Royal College camp that the army had to fire in the air to break up the *mélee*.

Even the proscription of the Federal Party did not serve to make martyrs of the Federalists and save their cause. The attitude of the refugees towards them spread among their relatives and eventually through most of the peninsula. The Tamil people found themselves, perhaps for the first time, without a leader or a sense of direction. They only wanted to be left alone to lick their wounds and plan their pitiful future.

The Federal Party found itself in a political abyss. At the General Election it had been returned with no less enthusiasm than that which the MEP had inspired in Sinhalese areas. It had therefore considerable claims to represent a substantial section of Tamil interests. Premier Bandaranaike had acknowledged this when he entered into negotiations with the party's leader, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, and had signed the Pact which bound all the Tamil interests to the Federal Party's programme.

The delay in the implementation of the Pact had drained away a great deal of popular strength from the Federal Party. They needed an issue desperately in order to stay in the spotlight. This was one of the reasons for the anti-Sri campaign described earlier: a campaign begun against the wishes of Chelvanayakam, which had proved futile. The issue was too patently insubstantial to rouse any real popular fervour in the north—but it certainly succeeded in

provoking the retaliatory tar-brush campaign against Tamil signs in the south. Federal Party prestige had fallen very low by April 1958. It rose a few points when the B—C Pact was torn up by Premier Bandaranaike and the Party became the martyred victims of Premier Bandaranaike's political manoeuvres, but this trend ceased abruptly when the riots began. Tamils who had never taken an active role in politics suffered so much physically and spiritually that they began blaming their plight on the Federal Party.

The Prime Minister had made a very shrewd assessment of this situation when he decided on the bold step of proscribing the Federal Party on May 27. Many people expected a swing of sympathy towards the Federalists but it did not materialize. Moreover there were many Tamils, like Tamil Congressman G. G. Ponnambalam, who had preached communalism for fifteen years, and were only too ready to wag an I-told-you-so finger at the Federalists. Only one shred of prestige still remained—the indestructible reputation for integrity that Federal Leader S. J. V. Chelvanayakam had earned. Even in the face of such an overwhelming adversity, this reputation held.

On June 4 he had stood up in the House, his body bent, his face creased with the horror he had seen. At the refugee camp he had broken down and wept. Even the Sinhalese extremists in the Government Party who had demanded the extermination of the Tamils during the previous night were moved to give him a patient hearing.

But he was arguing from a pathetically futile brief and even his client had forsaken him. He found he was defending himself and the Federal Party who were being indicted by the Tamils as well as the Sinhalese. But one point which he made was vital to any serious evaluation of the cause of the riots. He placed on record his conviction that the murder of D. A. Seneviratne in Batticaloa had no connection with the race-riots. It was a 'private' murder committed at the instigation of Seneviratne's personal enemies.

Little did Chelvanayakam or his colleagues suspect that behind the Prime Minister's glasses his eyes were twinkling with dramatic irony. The House adjourned that night at about 10 p.m. As the Federal Party M.P.s left the premises they were accosted by the police and placed under house detention. Chelvanayakam and Party Secretary Dr E. M. V. Naganathan were held incommunicado in their homes in Kollupitiya. Those who had no homes in Colombo were detained at the Galle Face Hotel, on the second floor, overlooking the swimming pool.

The Federalist leaders arrested were: S. J. V. Chelvanayakam (Kankasanturai), Dr E. M. V. Naganathan, V. A. Kandiah (Kayts), Dr V. K. Paramanayagam, V. N. Na. varatnam (Chavakachcheri), N. R. Rajavarothiam (Trincomalee), C. Vanniasingham (Kopay), C. Rajadurai (Batticaloa) and A. Amirthalingam (Vaddukoddai).

The demand for their arrest made by members of the Government Group the previous night had been answered. Fifty-two other Federal Party members, including a few Muslims, were arrested and placed under detention in Jaffna, Batticaloa and Mannar. The arrests continued to pile up to the impressive figure of 150. Premier Bandaranaike was experiencing the heady taste of absolute power for the first time. The arrest of the Federalists was a smooth operation.

But its slickness was marred by the failure of the Government to give the same treatment to the members of the other proscribed party—the Sinhalese leaders of the Jatika Vimukti

Peramuna. This operation took place a week later when K. M. P. Rajaratne was put under house arrest at Kotte.

Rural Reactions

With the Federal Leaders under arrest and the refugees removed from the danger zone, community life quickly began to return to normality, or so it seemed on the surface. But the refugee camps were murky reservoirs of terror and tension, which continued to pollute the entire atmosphere. They were an ugly symbol of national degeneration. The refugee population, both Tamil and Sinhalese, was soon exchanged as hostages of war would be exchanged. This eased the tension immediately so that judging only from superficial appearances things seemed to be settling down. The normality, however, was illusory.

It had been paid for at an exorbitant price by the people in terms of personal and civil liberties. The outward calm that now prevailed enabled people to look back and count the cost. What they found was terrifying. The country was being governed under martial law although martial law had not been proclaimed. Parliament had been forced virtually to abdicate authority to the Governor-General in his role as Commander-in-Chief.

New laws had been passed and old laws protecting the citizens' rights had been suspended with draconian ruthlessness. The ferocity of the new and unprecedented press censorship laws has already been described.

One by one the fundamental rights of the citizens were remorselessly stripped away. The authority of the Courts to intercede in any injustice done against a citizen was removed. Actions taken by the Government and its agents were decreed to be above the law. The right to appeal against harsh or unfair treatment was taken away without so much as by your leave. The Government decreed that it was not answerable to anyone in the land: no reason need be given for any of its decisions or acts.

Even the right to life was wrested from the citizen by fiat. A new law proclaimed under amendment on June 30 permitted any officer delegated by the Government to bury a dead body without an inquest, witnesses or even the most perfunctory record. Certain officials were quick to take advantage of their absolute power in order to settle old scores. No one will ever know how many people were speedily despatched in this way, no questions asked. On the very first day of the emergency the three writs— Habeas Corpus, Mandamus and a Certiorari—which protect the citizen against unlawful or unconscionable action of the State were suspended. Repressive measures were decreed by the mere say-so of the Governor-General and the Prime Minister, and these were applied with a remorselessness unprecedented even in the worst days of World War Two anywhere in the world except in Fascist Europe.

There was one good result which followed from the very harshness of the new laws: people who had taken the benefits of democracy for granted because they had been given democratic forms and privileges without their ever having to fight for them, began to learn to value consciously what they had lost. There was a noticeable change of attitude towards totalitarian politics and politicians who advocated anti-democratic measures. Many Ceylonese who had watched apathetically, disinterestedly, cynically or fatalistically while the gospel of totalitarianism was spreading far, wide and deep, began to ask awkward questions. They had received their first real taste of a police state and found it too bitter and harsh for their palate.

Extremism of all forms—racial, religious or political—was questioned and objected to more often and more vehemently than ever before.

In the Sinhalese rural areas two attitudes were dominant. The ‘People’s’ Government had let them down by taking such harsh, punitive steps against the Sinhalese who, they pointed out with considerable cogency, were only continuing along the logical course that had been set by Premier Bandaranaike himself when he made ‘Sinhala Only’ his campaign cry.

The other complaint was that emergency regulations such as the curfew ruined business. Vegetable farmers, for instance, were driven to desperate straits when dealers stopped buying because the curfew was driving their usual customers home early. The paddy farmers and the betel growers who are accustomed to start work before dawn cursed with increasing venom as the curfew continued.

There were the odd incidents, too, which heightened people’s animosity towards the totalitarian regulations under which they were living.

In the North-Western Province an angry delegation came to Colombo to meet their M.P. They told a pressman that they wanted him to resign from the Government and cross to the Opposition. Their reason? It was a piquant story.

A man in their village was bitten by a deadly snake just after dusk. Two of his relatives ran four miles to fetch a snake-bite specialist. The three men hurried back but the curfew caught them halfway. A police patrol arrested them and placed them in the lock-up for the night. Their pleas were of no avail because the police had no authority under the new regulations to let them off or bail them out. When they returned home the next morning they found that the patient was dead. Anger at the police mounted as the story spread in the district. Finally they had decided that this was but a symptom of a general malaise and had come to Colombo to place their point of view before their M.P. The M.P. concerned was, somehow, not available that day.

Human stories like this were proliferating rapidly. It became plain that the tension that had preceded the riots was being wound up again—but against the police state practices adopted to quell the disturbances.

Why did it happen?

The most persistent and most prickly questions were: what had been the cause of the communal troubles? Had they been organized or had they occurred spontaneously without any drive or direction from anyone? The short answer to the first question is that the cause of the communal troubles must be sought in time, circumstances and events far removed from the riots of 1958. The short answer to the second question:

‘Were the riots organized or spontaneous?’ is that the truth lies somewhere between those two explanations.

To expect a simple answer or a single explanation of the events that occurred in May and June would be to presuppose that human beings act rationally and purposefully even when their behaviour is actually sub-human. But from general observation of the forces that operate and events that take place when there are substantial minorities in a country, it is possible to

say that the common factor which has been present in race conflicts wherever they have occurred, is discernible in the context of Ceylon as well: the pressure of an economic challenge from the minority on the majority.

Underneath the complexity of events and crises it is this common economic factor that motivates the application of the principle of apartheid in South Africa, and the anti-Jewish attitudes in the West. An illuminating example has been the increasing reluctance in Britain towards the employment of Commonwealth immigrants. The United Kingdom has always shown a much more liberal attitude towards Commonwealth immigrants than the dominions have shown to Britons. But with the threat of the American recession hitting Britain after the usual time-lag there has been a noticeable change of 'Commonwealth' consciousness. The huge influx of West Indians in Britain and the fear that British industry would have to retrench have been among the causes of the increasing complaints by 'coloured' visitors of unprecedented discrimination against them.

The same factor is at the bottom of the racial disturbances in Ceylon. This is more clearly seen in the open economic warfare that has been waged between the Kandyans and the Indian immigrant labour population on the tea estates. The Kandyan peasantry, through its articulate representatives, has been pressing for ten years for the repatriation of Indian labourers so that the Kandyans may fill the vacancies on the estates.

A study of the speeches of most Sinhalese politicians who denounced the Bandaranaike—Chelvanayakam Pact would bear out the fact that the fear that activated their successful struggle was the possibility that the Indian immigrant labourers, numbering over 1,000,000 and the Ceylon Tamils, numbering about the same, would form a powerful alliance with which they could retain economic control of the island.

Even Dudley Senanayake's speeches against the B—C Pact were based on his avowed antipathy towards allocating the potential economic resources of the North-Central and Eastern Provinces to a separate racial group in perpetuity as contemplated under the Pact.

This economic pressure—the fear of being elbowed out of employment and business—played a substantial part in the race hatred that came to a crisis in 1958. When 'liberal minded' people speak nostalgically of the glorious past of forty to fifty years ago when the Sinhalese and the Tamil leaders such as Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan fought shoulder to shoulder with Sinhalese like F. R. Senanayake and Burghers like Sir Hector Van Cuylenburg, they rarely ask themselves the question that must logically follow. What is the difference between then and now? The answer to this question will indicate the real issue at the bottom of the race troubles.

Thirty years ago, or, for that matter, ten years ago, the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers of Ceylon meant the same thing when they spoke of Independence, Freedom, and National Culture. They spoke of being independent of foreign control in managing Ceylon's affairs, or of freedom from dictation by Whitehall or of an indigenous culture decayed by antiquity and ill-use but uncontaminated by Western modes and forms which had dominated South and South-East Asia for four hundred years.

The Sinhalese and the Tamil peasantry had never mixed or met. The large masses of the two populations lived in separate concentrations—the Sinhalese in the south and west and the Tamils in the north and east. Of course in almost every Sinhalese village and certainly in

every town there have always been Tamils, but they were there for the specific purpose of running a kiosk or provision store or pawn-broker's shop. Or they were public officials employed by the Central Government or local authority.

Likewise, in predominantly Tamil districts, there were Sinhalese who had drifted there for specific purposes, though in much smaller numbers than the Tamils in the Sinhalese areas. This is easily explained by the fact that there were more economic opportunities in the relatively fertile provinces in which the Sinhalese predominated.

The physical separation of the large mass of Sinhalese and Tamils was a major factor in the prevention of racial rivalry for many hundred years. The Sinhalese and the Tamils were also insulated by the vast forests and the scrub wastes that lie between the concentrations of population.

In ancient times it was otherwise. When the Sinhalese Kingdom was centred in Anuradhapura, the proximity of the Sinhalese to the Tamils in the north provided the ideal setting for race warfare, and the agrarian wealth of the region provided the motivation for the economic competitiveness that inevitably led to open conflict. There was constant conflict between the two elements. But when the forest swept over this region and the centres of gravity of the population moved towards Kandy and the West Coast, separating the two major races, their internecine rivalry died down.

Looking at recent events from this point of view, it is not surprising that the clearing of the jungles and the resettlement of people in contiguous racial groups in the North-Central Province led to a re-awakening of the old fires of communal conflict. The tension and terrorism at Padaviya, Polonnaruwa, Hingurakgoda and Dambulla seem to contain an element of historical inevitability.

Middle Class Tensions

The majority of the Sinhalese and Tamils, as we have seen, never mixed in sizeable concentrations. But while the Sinhalese and Tamil peasants were separated physically, linguistically and economically from each other, the middle classes, the white-collar groups, merged freely in Colombo and the bigger towns, living side by side, working in the same social and economic fields, competing with each other for jobs, in trade and for supremacy in sport. The social and cultural atmosphere in which they were reared tended to blur the racial division between them.

They spoke in English to each other and to their employers. They assimilated Western culture with much greater facility than almost any other Orientals did. At school they studied British and European history. Very little, if any, Ceylon history was taught in the schools. When an 'educated' Ceylonese used a phrase such as 'the extravagance of the sixteenth century' he was not talking about the era of Buvaneka Bahu VII of Ceylon, but of Elizabethan England. He knew more about the battles of the first Duke of Marlborough than about Ceylon's war against the Portuguese.

His values were minted abroad in British public schools. The liberalism and humanism of the English Universities was absorbed by him with the same ease as such essentially British phenomena as cricket and rugby football.

Against this background of tolerance it was easy to practise a kind of facile laissez faire in social and cultural affairs. A man was every bit as good as his neighbour if he had been to the same school or at least one of the other five public schools. As long as a man's table manners, conversation, clubmanship and general background were all right his race, caste and even his origins and financial status could be ignored. Racial integration was widespread and deep in the professions, in trade, in the public service and in sport, but however faint the line of demarcation was, it continued to exist in private relationships.

However liberal and 'broadminded' people were, very few of them could bear to contemplate the possibility of their sons or daughters marrying 'out of' race. This barrier was of course reinforced by the continuation of caste considerations in marriage. Moreover there was a notable difference between the middle-class English-educated Sinhalese and his Tamil counterpart.

Most Sinhalese who received an English education and adopted Western manners and values as though to the manner born, did so neglecting and even scorning their own traditions, language and forms. Most Tamils, on the other hand, skilfully balanced the two roles. In Colombo or in London they tried to be model Westernized 'gentlemen', wearing the correct dress with calculated casualness, speaking the correct tongue with cultivated allusiveness and careful avoidance of the distinctive accent of the denizens of the north.

But, unlike the English-educated Sinhalese they preferred to live closer to their traditional soil. They slipped with accomplished grace from their European clothes into their verti and shawl. However deep their new roots in Colombo may have run they found no difficulty in being cosmopolitan braves in Colombo, and peninsular Tamils when they went to Jaffna (which was quite often, since most Tamils maintained their traditional habitats in their 'villages' in the north and the east). And, most significant of all, the average English-educated Tamil was more conscious of his religious tradition than his Sinhalese friends and colleagues were.

Despite this underlying divergence of attitude, the middle classes were able to mix freely and amicably as long as they did not clash in economic competition. While there were employment opportunities in the public and mercantile services for clerks, accountants, junior field officers and executives, middle-class race relations were ideal.

But, by the end of the war and at about the time when Ceylon became politically independent, the pressure on employment began to mount. Thousands who had been employed in war-time service were demobilized and sought employment in the public services or in private firms. Every year the Free schools were turning out tens of thousands of young men and women desperately anxious to earn a living to help their parents out or to start a life of their own. Unfortunately there was no corresponding increase in jobs in the mercantile world or in the Government or municipal services. By 1950 these services were saturated with personnel. The school system had been devised by the British to produce clerks by the hundred. It continued to do so although no one wanted clerks any more. There were—and are - opportunities for technically skilled youths, but the education system does not provide facilities for technical training.

For the Tamils, the public service and the mercantile services had long been the principal means of earning a livelihood. Lacking the relatively vast acres of arable land enjoyed by the Sinhalese, they had turned to white-collar jobs for their economic salvation. Almost every

Tamil family concentrated on getting their sons—and if possible their daughters—into the Government or mercantile service. They made an aim of it and when they achieved the aim they made a career of it.

They had certain distinct advantages in their pursuit of public service jobs. Jaffna has, per head of population, much better educational opportunities than the rest of Ceylon. Foreign missions had established schools in Jaffna many decades ago and had given the people of Jaffna a tradition of schooling.

Moreover, the Tamil boy is relatively more diligent than the Sinhalese—like the Jew in the West, he has to be to exist. The result was that Tamils did extremely well in public examinations and were able to get the jobs they were qualified to do.

By 1950 the shrinking of employment opportunities became acute. ‘Educated’ unemployment was on the rise and many of these youths, frustrated and articulate, were beginning to join the Marxist parties which gave them promise of jobs and a better standard of living. The Government of the day was fumbling in a futile manner against these problems, expecting people to live on promises of sunshine tomorrow or the next day but never today.

The Sinhalese, being greater in numbers, cried loudest against the Government’s apathy but when they looked about them, many of them saw that if the Tamils were not in the public and mercantile services there would be very much more room for the Sinhalese.

There were politicians ready to encourage this brand of thinking and they lost no time in building this race-awareness into a more erosive force. It began to be widely believed that the Tamils occupied an average of about 60 per cent of the places in the public service. Whenever responsible Cabinet Ministers made this statement it acquired a great deal of credibility.

Indeed, when people examined the race composition of certain sections of the Public Works Department or the Audit Department, the charge that there had been some deliberate ‘packing’ of Tamils in the public service was difficult to refute. Certain Government departments had a large percentage of Tamil personnel. There is no doubt that there was a certain amount of place-fixing and promotion-mongering among the Tamils employed in the public service. This is not unusual, for wherever minorities work they have a tendency to strengthen themselves numerically whenever the opportunity arises.

There is, however, no way of estimating how much of these charges is true. No reliable count has been taken of the racial composition of the Government services. But one fact is certain from common observation: the theory that 60, 50 or even 40 per cent of the public service is composed of Tamils is patently false. What lends credence to this false impression is the fact mentioned above—the abnormal concentrations of Tamils in particular Government departments.

The most serious mistake that a minority which wishes to be regarded as an integral part of a nation can make is to attract avoidable attention. Huddling together in tight enclaves is perhaps the most dangerous of these mistakes. It is an observable fact in the history of racial conflict that ghetto walls are generally built from the inside. This exclusivity hardly ever provokes the envy of people but it always attracts notice and hostility. The Tamil colony in Wellawatte had long been an object of critical and derisive notice among communal-minded

Sinhalese in Colombo. When this colony, overcrowded as it was, spread further south into Ratmalana which was fast developing with the widening of the Galle Road and the improvement of the bus services, the derision turned into alarm.

The residents of Ratmalana saw justification for the forebodings of the extremist Sinhalese politicians when they found that this area which had been traditionally a Sinhalese residential district was rapidly becoming colonized by new Tamil settlers. The establishment of an exclusively Tamil college and the increasingly large proportion of Tamils in the new housing estates caused them to wonder whether Ratmalana was becoming a 'Little Jaffna'. It is not a matter for wonder, therefore, that during the riots the worst damage in the Colombo area was done in Wellawatte and Ratmalana.

Perhaps, to round off this observation, it should be added that there are psychological reasons for this tendency to huddle together in little groups. People with mutual interests, common relatives, similar social and religious habits naturally tend to congregate. It is for these reasons that Ceylonese and Indians traveling 7,000 miles to see London, generally choose to live in Earls Court, now sometimes called 'Little India' by British people. Chinatown, Harlem, the Jewish Quarter and the 'Europeans Only' residential districts in the East and Africa are all evidence of this natural desire to find comfort in numbers. But this exclusivity is achieved at a price. It attracts unwelcome attention.

No one troubled to investigate whether the charge was true, partially true or false, but many Sinhalese—outside the public service rather than within it—came to believe that the Tamils had formed a secret conspiracy to take control of Colombo and the administration of the country by sinister infiltration.

This charge was widely publicized among Sinhalese speaking people by various propaganda devices. The result was that although the racist feelings of many middle—class Sinhalese were kept in control by their habit of restraint, goondas broke out in violence against the Tamil officials as soon as the riots broke out in Polonnaruwa and Colombo.

On the very first day of the communal clashes in Colombo the goondas directed their activities against the Tamil public and mercantile clerks who were returning home after a day's work. Many of the buildings that were burnt in the Ratmalana area belonged to Tamil public servants or pensioners. The heaviest attacks seemed to be on them.

This is what first led the police and the Governor-General to suspect that some organization was behind the race-riots, inviting the goondas and directing their operations.

There could be little doubt that there was organization behind the riots in certain areas—particularly Ratmalana, Polonnaruwa, Kurunegala and Badulla. But who was it? Was it one organization or many? The Government's intelligence machinery proved to be quite inadequate to provide an answer for these questions. They had little more than hunches and post-rationalizations to justify their theories. The probability, however, was that the riots which had broken out according to the pattern we have seen, provided an opportunity for many groups ready to fish for power in troubled waters.

An observation made by Deputy Inspector-General of Police (Range Two) Sidney de Zoysa at the police officers' secret conference of June 13, though extravagant, confirms this view. This is the relevant part of the official minutes of that meeting.

Who is the Master Brain?

D.I.G., C.I.D., said that he was not prepared to answer that question. DIG. Range Two, said that, talking of his Range at least, he could see the hand of the NLSSP in some places and at others that of the VLSSP, the CP, the UNP and even the MEP!

It is surprising that an officer of such experience and acumen should have left out the Federal Party and the Jatika Vimukti Peramuna (the two banned parties) from his reckoning. The explanation for this discrepancy is surely that he was talking in broad, general terms to convey his impression that politicians covering the entire gamut from Right to Left had tried to turn the situation to their own advantage.

The communal fires spread so fast and furiously that no one was able to harness their power and direct its spread towards any particular goal. Among the political parties the heaviest losers were those of the MEP. People began to react sharply against the military rule that had suddenly been imposed on them. Many people who had whooped for sheer joy when the United National Party had been trounced in 1956 were heard to remark nostalgically that 'whatever his faults, Sir John would not have permitted things to get into such a muddle'.

The Government was aware of this reaction and took every opportunity to discredit the UNP and blame the riots on the communalist elements in that party. Nevertheless it was clear that the tremendously popular hold that the MEP had on the people two years ago had been violently broken by the same vocal elements that had brought this party to such an overwhelming triumph against the mighty UNP at the 1956 General Election.

The Rule of Law

How had this come about? The process by which the MEP found itself in this situation in 1958 is evident in the pattern of the events we have seen. The spinal column of the body politic is LAW; shatter this or damage it seriously and the entire body becomes paralysed. Respect for the law among the people makes for order, without which no government is possible, so that it is the business of the rulers, from the point of view of self-preservation as well as public duty, to enforce the law whenever it is blatantly flouted. In order to maintain order the Government is empowered to use a police force, a civil administration and, at times of extraordinary disturbance, a military arm. Any government that destroys the authority of these services and whips up the suspicion and hatred of the people against them is surely undermining its own strength.

An incident which occurred at the first meeting of the new Parliament gave a clear sign of things to come. There was great enthusiasm when the MEP Government came triumphantly to the House of Representatives to start the task of bringing the new millennium into being. The crowd stormed the council chamber, clambering over the benches and even sitting on the Speaker's chair. When the police had tried to block them, they had been ordered to 'Let the People have their way'. The crowd jeered and hooted at the police. Inspectors and constables looked on shamefacedly while they got their first glimpse of the Apey Aanduwa mentality in action.

Before a month was out some Ministers, still riding high on the wave of popular acclaim, were denouncing the police from public platforms, flinging vile allegations at them and

accusing them of being politically opposed to the People's Government. The crowds loved it, like children watching the Headmaster ticking off the class teacher in their presence.

When the Gal Oya riots of 1956 broke out a few months later the police were already demoralized. Until Deputy Inspector-General of Police Sydney de Zoysa went there and threatened to arrest even Cabinet Ministers if they incited the mob to violence, the politicians made inflammatory speeches against police action.

In Colombo, on that occasion, the police looked on or looked the other way when Tamils were beaten up on the street hardly a hundred yards away from the House of Parliament. They did not move a finger when hoodlums stripped a Federalist politician and chased him all the way across the Galle Face green to the hotel. Police explained that they had been ordered not to interfere.

Soon after the shine had worn off the new Government a series of strikes began all over the country. In two years Ceylon was to experience over 400 strikes. The police were under orders not to interfere with the demonstrators so that the demonstrators were able to break all the laws of peaceful picketing with impunity. The police looked on shamefacedly while rotten eggs or tomatoes and red ink were thrown at staff officers and non-union members who refused to strike.

Politicians rode into police stations and demanded the immediate release of this or that suspect, held for questioning or production before a magistrate. They usually had their way. Things came to such a pass that the Prime Minister had to make a public appeal to the police to remember that the new ruling party was composed of immature politicians who needed time to get used to their position of vantage. But it was not the new men who were making the most trouble. Seasoned campaigners who had suffered at the hands of the police when they were in Opposition were also getting their own back.

The Apey Aanduwa complex spread through the island and deep into the instincts of the mischief-maker and the hoodlums. Their brashness was reinforced by the knowledge that the death penalty had been abolished: the thought that they would not have to swing for it whatever violence they committed was a great source of strength to them.

The manufacture of hand-bombs and other deadly missiles became a widespread cottage industry. The law and its arm, the police, were becoming increasingly hopeless and helpless at the time of the big strikes and the race-riots of May and June.

Politicians were able to get away with major offences without any fear of prosecution. On the contrary they stood a good chance of being nominated as 'heroes'.

In April 1958 police received information that a major religious conflict was brewing in the Maradana area over the building of a new Catholic Church. The Assistant Superintendent of Police of Maradana, A. C. Lawrence, had to place a guard at the church to prevent trouble. The Government's way of dealing with the situation was to transfer the A.S.P. to another station in order to 'assuage' the people who were threatening trouble.

At the police officers' conference held on June 13 to discuss the emergency the beaten-dog whine of the police is unmistakable. The fear of political reprisals, such as commissions of inquiry and dismissals, weighed heavily on their minds and the thought of the horrors they

had witnessed due to the inactivity imposed on them weighed heavily on their conscience as human beings and as trained policemen.

This official verbatim record of that meeting is self-explanatory.

Secret Proceedings of the Conference held at Police Headquarters
On Friday, 13 June 1958

Present:

Mr. S. W. O. de Silva, O.B.E., Inspector-General of Police (in the Chair) C. C. Dissanayaka, Deputy Inspector-General Range One, S.G. de Zoysa, Deputy Inspector-General Range Two, Mr. W. A. R. Leembruggen, Deputy Inspector-General Admin., S.A. Dissanayaka, Deputy Inspector-General Criminal Investigation Department, D.C. T. Pate, Deputy Inspector-General Emergency.

C. P. Wambeek R. Rajasingham
D. S. E. P. R. Senanayake J. F. B. Johnpulle
W. E. C. Jebanasan V. O. L. Potger
T. H. Kelaart N. W. Weerasinghe
H. K. Vanden Driesen J. A. Selvaratnam
R. E. Kitto S. K. Iyer
J. A. A. Perera S. T. Thuraisingham
J. W. L. Attygalle C. L. O. Conderlag
B. W. Perera T. B. Danapala
J. M. H. Toussaint F. H. de Saram
B. C. Wijemanne A. H. F. Caldera
L. H. Bibile S. D. Chandrasinghe
H. R. Hepponstall A. D. Rodrigo
I. D. M. Van Twest G. Jayasinghe
R. A. Stork A. C. Lawrence
D. S. Thambyah D. S. S. Jayatilleke
A. J. Rajasooriya L. D. C. Herath

Discussion

The IG said that he summoned this Conference to hold a post-mortem on police attitudes and action in connection with the recent disturbances but not for the purpose of fault-finding with any individual officer. The first phase, he said, was over and there may or may not be a second or a third phase. It was, however, best to hold a post-mortem on the first phase to find out whether the police had slipped up and, if so, how, in order that the necessary steps may be taken to prevent a repetition of the same mistakes in similar circumstances in the future.

He said that the criticism most frequently leveled against the police was that at the early stages police were not sufficiently firm in their actions and that even after the emergency was declared, somehow or other, the police allowed things to drift by not tackling looting and other acts of hooliganism promptly and with sufficient force, with the result that things got worse.

Even before the emergency there were requests from practically all districts for the assistance of army units and this, the IG. said, was not a good sign at all. The police had about the same equipment as the army and also greater numerical strength. There was, therefore, no reason why the police should not have relied on their own resources in the first instance and called in the army only after all possible action had been taken but still found that police resources were insufficient.

The IG. said that Mr C. C. Dissanayaka had prepared a few points for discussion and he called upon Mr Dissanayaka to mention them.

Mr Dissanayaka confirmed that this conference was not meant to find fault with anyone. He, however, cautioned that in the course of the post-mortem some hard facts may have to be stated, but they should not be taken as a reflection on any officer personally. It was in that spirit that officers should enter the discussion.

He said that although there were several matters which merited consideration he had selected only the following because they were, by far, the most vital:

1. Was police ineffectiveness due to any weakness at the top, at the centre or at the bottom, i.e. bad officering or leadership, weakness in the inspectorate or weakness in the constabulary?
2. Were the police splitting up into racial groups, religious groups or any other groups?
3. Was the studied inactivity of the police, specially on the 26th of May, due to their acting on instructions from anybody or were the police in sympathy with the thugs or with any other movement, or due to any other cause?
4. The Colombo Division opened fire five times, but no one was hit.
5. What was this new tendency, and how did it arise, of repeated requests being made from all parts of the country for the military and everybody saying that no action was being taken as they were awaiting orders? Orders from whom? The law was quite clear as also were the Firing Orders!
6. There had been allegations, some true, about:
 - (i) thieving by the police and
 - (ii) police actively conniving when looting was actually going on in the presence of the police.
7. Should the 'Take Posts' scheme be re-introduced?
8. Was the trouble caused by outside gangs or by local thugs? Who organized them? Who led them?
9. Was the trouble over or had the police seen only the shape of things to come?
10. Let us not bluff ourselves. Let us at least be honest by the service and not make excuses such as that police inactivity was due to:

- (i) fear of commissions or
- (ii) the Prime Minister's orders.

11. The police system of collecting intelligence had miserably failed. How could this be rectified? Or were the other organizations becoming cleverer than the police?

12. How was police morale? How could it be stepped up in order to keep the police as one undivided, efficient and effective unit?

Item No. 1

Mr Kitto said that police morale had hit the very bottom— that the men were just dispirited and that they had confidence neither in themselves nor in their officers. The officers in turn felt that they were being let down by Headquarters like a ton of bricks, even when they acted in accordance with the law. This was what he had been able to gather from a number of officers. He however, wished to make it quite clear that neither he nor the officers were referring to either the I.G. personally or to any particular officer at Headquarters, but rather to the present H.Q. set-up in general.

The I.G. said that if officers entertained such a fear it was unfounded. He quoted several instances to prove conclusively that he never for once hesitated to stand by the Service and by the officers, even at the risk of incurring the displeasure of the Prime Minister or jeopardizing his own position as IG. The DIG. and some of the other officers knew it.

It was therefore wrong for the officers to feel that their superiors at H.Q. were prepared to sacrifice them in order to curry favour with the powers-that-be, merely because the IG. had to carry out some unreasonable order such as the transfer of an officer or the release of some miscreants arrested by the police, etc., etc. He wished to assure all present that he was convinced that hardly any of his predecessors would have done what he had done to stand so firmly by the Service and by the officers. If in the future a sacrifice had to be made for their sake, he said that he would be the first to face the music as in fact, up to now, he had been the one who had had to take in all the shocks.

Referring to the recent transfer of Mr. A. C. Lawrence, D.I. G. Range One said that the move was vehemently opposed by H. Q. although unsuccessfully and that beyond that there was little or nothing they could do. Such cases should not, however, lead officers to think that they generally lacked the backing and the support of Headquarters.

Mr. Wijemanne said that possibly one reason for police not acting as fairly as they should have done may be the admonition to 'use tact' contained in the order that went out from H.Q. on the declaration of the State of Emergency. He said that perhaps this admonition might have acted as a brake on certain officers who might have acted differently otherwise. This view was shared by several other officers present.

The IG. explained that the real purpose in inserting this harmless clause was to convince the authorities, Parliamentarians and Commissions, in the event of the police being later called upon to explain some of their actions that, in spite of the

Emergency, the police did not go berserk but acted with firmness and restraint.

[A Superintendent of Police] said that he was personally aware of the extent to which the I.G. had gone to stand by his officers and the Service with no consideration whatsoever for personal repercussions. He felt that the fault lay not with H.Q. but with the Prime Minister who did not permit the police to do a job of work as it should be done.

He referred to the case where he was ordered to move out some police pickets who had been manning certain points for a number of days and who, in the process, had got to know very well the local thugs—the reason for the order being that these pickets were getting rather ‘trigger’ minded whereas the real reason was that, in the event of a show-down, these pickets could easily identify the troublemakers.

The net result of this unnecessary interference was that when the balloon actually went up the new pickets had no idea of the local ne’er-do-wells and could neither control them effectively nor identify them when they created trouble.

D.I.G. Admin said that his view in regard to inactivity by the police when compared with the army, was that the police probably thought further ahead and realized that they had to be on the scene doing patrols, manning beats, etc., even after the army had withdrawn, and due to their morale having been so badly shattered during the past months, they were compelled to adopt the line of least resistance so that they may not have to face an unfriendly public when conditions reverted to normal and they had to be on their own once again.

DIG. Range Two felt that it was certainly the wrong way to look at it. When the occasion so demanded it, the police had to enforce the law without fear or favour, and the Police Ordinance itself was very clear about the manner cowardly police officers were to be dealt with.

It was because of this and in appreciation of the risks to which they were exposed that very handsome terms of compensation had been promised. If they could not carry out their duties as they ought to, it was better for the relevant section to be cut out of the Police Ordinance and also give up the claims for enhanced compensation. There was no point, he said, in the police taking action only when they were attacked or when their police stations or homes were attacked, and doing nothing when other people’s persons or property were attacked or looted as the case may be.

Item No. 2

DIG. C.I.D. said that in a service of eight thousand-odd men there were bound to be some officers who were in support of various movements, but generally speaking, he felt that the Service was together and non-sectarian.

DIG. Admin. referred to an incident at one station where certain disruptive elements were at work, and how prompt action was taken to transfer the men concerned. He said that in all such instances prompt and firm action was imperative.

DIG. Range Two said that these were days which called for more and more contact

between officers and their OICC Stations, and between OICC. Stations and their men with a view to binding the Service together, apprising the rank and file of the dangers of the psychological warfare going on everywhere and which might eventually even affect the Service, and boosting up morale to the highest pitch by way of insulating against the disruptive forces at work. That was the only way of keeping the brotherhood of the Service alive.

Item No 3

Mr Wijemanne referred to May 26 when assaults on Tamils and looting were going on before the very eyes of the police officers on duty near the Fort Railway Station, but who did nothing about it saying that their instructions were to be near the railway station.

DIG. Range Two said that the Service had reached a stage when it was no longer prepared to carry out orders blindly from anybody and that if it was necessary for the police to act in directions convenient to the authorities, the senior officers at H.Q. would be the first to walk out with the rest. He quoted that D.I.G. Range One had made the position quite clear to the highest authorities.

DIG. Admin. said that the police were apt to feel that the military would act as they liked and even run the show on occasions. It was not so. The army should work under the police and the police must see to it that the army did not behave as they wanted.

The I.G. said that whether there was an emergency or not, when the army went out to a district the S.P. or the ASP. should assume command and it was his business to tell the army what to do and when precisely action was needed.

Item No. 4

The IG. said that the police must once and for all get out of their heads the question of firing in the air or over the heads of mobs. The experience of every country was that it was worse than not firing at all.

D.I.G. Range Two said that this tendency might possibly be due to a feeling of 'oneness' created between the police and the thugs as a result of the latter winning over the goodwill of the police by openly declaring that they were with the police and would not permit any harm befalling them. This was an insidious way of getting round the police and the men should be duly warned against this line of approach.

Item No. 5

It was agreed that hereafter the army should be called in only if they were absolutely necessary. It was felt that if the police were firm from the word go the need to call in the army would seldom arise.

D.I.G. Range Two said that the army was doing a good job of work in the present emergency and that in a way they were helping the police to get to the top once again, but the great thing was that once the police got to the top, it should be possible for the police to maintain that position and to be able to tell the army to stand-by.

Item No. 6

D.I.G. Range One said that there were some true cases of thieving and also aiding and abetting of looting by the police and it was up to officers to see that this was never again repeated; all those detected should be most severely dealt with.

Item No. 7

The I.G. asked officers to consider the feasibility of reviving the 'Take Posts' scheme as it had been very effective in the past.

Mr. Vanden Driesen said that patrolling by mobile armed parties would be more effective than 'Take Posts'.

D.I.G. Range Two stressed that men who were posted at various points should know very clearly what their functions were. He cited the case of some men at a particular post, who, when questioned by him as to what they would do if their post was 'rushed', replied that they would go and report the matter to the local police station. The fear to use force must be discarded.

Item No. 8

Several officers commented on the fact that in most cases outside gangs of thugs were at work and that it was a well-organized campaign. Everything pointed to that. These thugs had adopted a code of their own to indicate whether the house or buildings occupied by Tamils belonged to Tamils or to Sinhalese, the number of inmates in each house, etc., etc.

Mr Kitto wanted to know what the position of the police would be in regard to Buddhist priests who were participating in mob activities?

D.I.G. Range Two said that this point had already been thrashed out with the Prime Minister himself who had sanctioned the action against the Buddhist priests if they continued to flout the police. He said that A.S.P. Bandarawela had already got a priest remanded in a looting case, and that two priests who were wanted by the Kalutara police for interrogation were absconding. He said that in view of what was happening in the country today the inviolability of the Buddhist priests could not be retained any longer. He, however, made it very clear that the so-called priests who participated in these activities were not genuine priests but impostors masquerading in the guise of priests. He referred to two hire-car drivers in Polonnaruwa who had shaved off their heads [sic] and in whose possession the police found Buddhist robes.

Mr Vanden Driesen said that it would be most helpful if the incidents referred to by D.I.G. Range Two were published in the press. The I.G. promised to take up this matter with Mr M.

J.Perera, the Information Officer.

Item No. 9

Mr Hepponstall said that there was a strong feeling that trouble would start again as soon as the Emergency was over. All officers felt that even if the curfew was lifted, the Emergency should go on for some considerable time.

D.I.G. Admin. said that all police stations should now draw up plans for the effective patrolling of all areas where there were minorities.

The I.G. exhorted all officers to instruct their men to shoot without hesitation if looting was going on. He also said that the task of restoring order should be given top priority and that normal police work should take second place for some time.

It was also agreed that sergeants and constables on duty should in future be armed with Sten guns instead of rifles. The I.G. promised to take up this matter.

The I.G. also said that in future refugees should be housed in some camp far from police stations, as the presence of refugees at police stations during the recent disturbances had made things very difficult for the police.

Item No. 10

D.I.G. Range Two asked officers to have no fear about commissions into police actions. He reminded officers of the Commission of Inquiry in connection with 'Operation Ganja'¹⁶ and inquired whether the Department took any steps against the police officers involved? On the contrary, he said that Inspector Liyanage had got his due promotion and was even handsomely rewarded for his good work.

The I.G. also said that several times he had been asked as to what action he was taking against the police officers involved in 'Operation Ganja', now that the report was out, and he had always replied that he was looking into the matter whereas, in actual fact, he had not done so yet in the interest of morale at this crucial period.

D.I.G. Range Two said that if anyone's uniform was to be taken out, the uniforms of the senior officers at H.Q. would first have to be taken out.

In regard to Orders by the Prime Minister, he said that if they were in conflict with fundamental principles of the police, the Service should stand together and resolutely oppose them, and there was not king for the officers to fear. He agreed with the I.G. that officers should not attach too much importance to events such as the transfer of an officer, appointment of a Commission, etc.

Item No.11

D.I.G., C.I.D. said that the intelligence received from the uniformed police was very poor.

The I.G. said that it was in their own interests for uniformed officers to find out the trouble-makers and what they were up to. He said that no piece of information, however insignificant it might appear to be, should be ignored as these bits and pieces will help to complete the picture eventually.

D.I.G., C.I.D. said that it would be a good thing for gazetted officers and members of

the inspectorate to go round some houses and find out what was happening and whether the inmates had any useful information to pass over to the police in their own interests. The J.G. commended this suggestion, asked officers to make a note of it and to feed D.I.G., C.I.D. with as much information as possible all the time.

D.I.G. Admin. said that there should be a Special Branch attached to every P.I.B. and D.I.B. It was decided to summon a Conference of all provincial officers next week so that D.I.G., C.I.D. may tell them on what lines to work in order to obtain useful information promptly.

Item No. 12

The I.G. said that he sincerely hoped that officers were convinced now at least that they would always be backed to the hilt by H.Q. He asked them not to lose heart if, at higher levels, the police were ordered to do certain things. He assured them that no unfair order of transfer, etc., was ever carried out without setting out the true position at a couple of interviews with the Prime Minister.

Who is the Master Brain?

D.I.G., C.I.D. said that he was not prepared to answer that question.

D.I.G. Range Two said that, talking of his Range at least, he could see the hand of the NLSSP in some places and at others that of the VLSSP, the CP, the UNP, and even the MEP!¹⁷

D.I.G. Range One said that he was following up some information and would be able to place before the I.G., very shortly, some useful information in regard to the overall plan.

The I.G. said that the fact remained that certain mischief makers were at work to create trouble in the country, and the pattern was more or less the same. Just now the police have the advantage of the Emergency behind them. It was the invariable practice, whenever there was an emergency, to pass a Bill indemnifying everybody. This would include the priests and so there was nothing for police officers to bother about. However, attempts to create dissension of one kind or another would go on, sometimes even by a few unscrupulous men in the police ranks, but it was up to the Service to see that law and order was maintained at all costs. It was the sacred duty the police owe the country.

Under the emergency the police had extraordinary powers and the police could not talk with their mouths but with their guns. There might be minor unpleasant incidents such as requests to release scoundrels arrested by the police, but these were orders the J.G. was compelled to carry out in the same way as junior officers had to carry out the I.G.'s orders, however unpleasant or unreasonable they might appear to be. But he said that unfair orders were never carried out by him without first putting up a fight.

When the Emergency was over, he said, everyone should buckle down to the task of planning for the future. In the meantime he urged all officers to have the fullest confidence in Headquarters. He and the D.I.G. would be with them and, if one had to

get out, all officers could rest assured that all would go out together. He asked officers not to take certain unpleasant incidents too seriously to heart, and also to talk to their men and keep their morale always high. If a man had to be rewarded for good work done, he said that the reward should both be handsome and prompt.

In conclusion the I.G. said: 'Let us be together, deliver the goods, and let the whole country know that we have done our duty. Go and hold your areas now and give your men the assurance that all of us are together. If we have to go away we go out together.' These words were received with applause by all present.

Sgd. S. W. O. de Silva,
Inspector-General of Police.
Police Headquarters,
Colombo, June 16, 1958.

Conclusion

The broad picture is now complete. Race-relationships which had endured for generations were breaking up under the pressure which is inevitable in a country in which economic development had not kept pace with modern needs and the high rate of population increase. Labour relations were cracking under the strain of the new social forces which the MEP had released. This second change, no doubt, was necessary and irresistible.

Unfortunately the Government made the mistake of throwing the baby away with the bath water. While repressive legislation and irksome, outmoded attitudes which had kept the masses in thrall had to be hurled away without delay, it was vital for the peace and order of the country, especially in times of rapid social change, to preserve and strengthen the rule of law and the authority of the officers who enforce the law. This salutary rule was ignored and even spurned in the extravagant mood of enthusiasm in which the Government tried to meet the massive problems that challenged its capabilities.

The terror and the hate that the people of Ceylon experienced in May and June 1958 were the outcome of that fundamental error. What are we left with? A nation in ruins, some grim lessons which we cannot afford to forget and a momentous question: Have the Sinhalese and the Tamils reached the parting of the ways?

Appendix

OFFICIAL DOCUMENT ENTRUSTED IN CONFIDENCE TO POLICE OFFICERS
ONLY

CEYLON POLICE GAZETTE

No. 5,444: Wednesday 16 July 1958

No. S.R. 250/58

Mr B. Weerasinghe, Assistant Superintendent of Police,
North-Central Province, and D. D. S. Ranasinghe, Head
Quarters Inspector, Anuradhapura—Award of the Ceylon

Police Medal for Gallantry.

Reference notification appearing in Police Gazette, Part i

No. 5,443 of July 9, 1958, page 75, on the above subject the following correspondence is published for the information of all ranks:

No. S.R.250/58

Police Headquarters, Colombo 1, 2nd July, 1958.

S/D & E.A.

Award of the Ceylon Police Medal for Gallantry to Mr B. Weerasinghe, A.S.P., and Inspector D. D. S. Ranasinghe.

I wish to bring to your notice and, through you, to the Hon'ble the Prime Minister, the acts of gallantry performed by Mr B. Weerasinghe, Assistant Superintendent in Charge of North-Central Province and Inspector D. D. S. Ranasinghe, Officer-in-Charge, Anuradhapura Police Station.

1. Mr B. Weerasinghe.

(a) During the period of the unprecedented December 1957 floods, North-Central Province was one of the worst affected areas in the island. A very heavy responsibility was cast on the police in the matter of rescue of large numbers of flood victims. Mr Weerasinghe who was in charge, by leading his men in almost every dangerous and risky rescue operation, acted with courage and with utter disregard for his own personal safety in saving valuable lives. In appreciation of the outstanding services rendered by him, the following commendation was awarded:

'Mr B. Weerasinghe, Assistant Superintendent of Police, North-Central Province, is highly commended by the Inspector-General of Police for setting up a high standard of leadership, initiative and hard work during the entire period of the December floods. The example set by him went a long way towards encouraging his men to renewed efforts. He also displayed courage of a high order in rescue operations under hazardous conditions.'

Shortly after the floods this officer was faced with incidents and problems arising out of the Anti-Sri Campaign and the strike situation. These were dealt with by him in the North-Central Province with firmness and tact.

(b) During the recent Communal Disturbances, Mr Weerasinghe had again to carry the extremely difficult and trying responsibility of suppressing violence and thuggery which broke out in the North-Central Province on an unprecedented scale. In Polonnaruwa, Giritale and Hingurakgoda a critically tense situation unleashed itself into frenzied violence which had never been experienced before in this country, and conditions in these places on the morning of the 26th May, 1958, have been assessed as being infinitely worse than what occurred at Gal Oya in 1956. Hordes of thugs and rioters, armed with shot guns, grenades, explosives, swords, katties and other dangerous weapons poured as if from nowhere into the streets bent on murder, rioting and looting. Hopelessly outnumbered and out-weaponed, this officer did not satisfy himself with merely guarding his police station and his own skin, which admittedly he might have done with some justification.

He decided in the circumstances that his first obligation was to protect the persons who were being murdered and assaulted, and carried the fight right through Kaduruwela Bazaar, dispersing mobs all along the road. At 9.30 a.m. at Hospital Junction his vehicle was shot at, and

the first police shooting occurred when he and Inspector Carolis fired at a man levelling his shot gun at them. Subsequently Mr Weerasinghe and his men were attacked on numerous occasions. By noon a fair measure of control was gained by the police, but conditions worsened again when a mass attack was made on the Polonnaruwa Police Station.

Mr Weerasinghe averted this attack by personally ordering fire on the rioters. Four were killed and two were injured. By evening, police—with the invaluable assistance of two military units which arrived in the nick of time—were on top of the situation. Resistance, which was met at Giritale, Minneriya and Hingurakgoda, was overcome but without recourse to firing. In all these operations Mr Weerasinghe was in personal command. By the 29th May Polonnaruwa and Hingurakgoda were peaceful again.

On his return to Anuradhapura at 2 p.m. on 30th May, 1958, Mr Weerasinghe received information of a large motorized unit of thugs on the rampage at Medawachchiya. He immediately set out with a military unit under the command of Major McHeyzer. He was just in time to prevent the wiping out of a small police party under Inspector D. D. S. Ranasinghe, who were holding them at bay.

Mr B. Weerasinghe had worked from 23rd May to the 1st of June ceaselessly day and night, leading his men personally throughout the length and breadth of the North-Central Province. He has narrowly escaped death on several occasions. He was in the forefront of the riots at Kaduruwela, Minneriya, Mahadivulwewa in time to rescue a very gallant Inspector and his six men from certain death. By his leadership, initiative and hard work, he has set a splendid example to his men who responded magnificently to true leadership. He has shown outstanding courage and devotion to duty. This officer and his men of the North-Central Province have created a record for gallantry and devotion to duty of which the entire Service is justly proud.

2. Inspector D. D. S. Ranasinghe.

(a) During the period of the floods in December, this officer worked day and night in perilous rescue operations, saving the lives of hundreds of refugees.

His best achievement, amongst numerous acts of bravery, was when he jumped from a helicopter into swollen flood waters to save the lives of thirteen women and children marooned on a rooftop at Ratmalie. Inspector Ranasinghe showed leadership and initiative of a very high order and his actions were characterized by fearless devotion to duty.

(b) During the Communal Disturbances at Anuradhapura, there was large-scale arson in the suburbs. Inspector Ranasinghe actively engaged himself in suppressing this and worked with his men round the clock for many days.

On the 30th May, 1958, at about 4 p.m., Inspector Ranasinghe and six men encountered a motorized unit of about 600 thugs armed to the teeth on the Kebutigollewa Road at Mahadivulwewa. His jeep was fired upon and his party was attacked by shot gun fire and sand bottles.

Taking cover behind his jeep, Inspector Ranasinghe and his men held this entire mob at bay with rifle fire until he was rescued by a police and military patrol unit. This motorized unit consisted of 8 Land Development vehicles, 2 Euclids from the Padaviya Scheme, a water bowser, a vehicle with petrol and an explosives vehicle. An examination of these vehicles revealed huge bombs of dynamite in 4 gallon tins, hand grenades and Molotov cocktails by

the hundreds, guns, swords and deadly weapons. These vehicles were manned by about 500 to 600 Land Development labourers. Mr C. C. Dissanayaka, Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Range (One) who examined these explosives and weapons commented that never in his experience of 24 years' police service had he come across such a vast quantity of death-dealing explosives.

In the capture of this armed convoy, 11 men were killed by fire in a police cum military action, whilst 26 others were injured. 393 rioters were taken into custody whilst about 200 escaped.

The plan of this convoy, as revealed by some of the prisoners who were taken into custody, was as follows:

They were to attack Anuradhapura by dark when they would be received by supporters in the town who were ready to cut the power lines. Having destroyed the Police Station, they were next to destroy the Tamil refugees in the protective camp at the Kachcheri. There were over 3,000 Tamil refugees at the time in Anuradhapura and a crowded refugee train. After a blood bath at Anuradhapura, they were next to proceed with added strength to Matale where, after similar orgies, they were finally to attack Kandy.

By this heroic action in combating this army of thugs, Inspector Ranasinghe has prevented the destruction of hundreds of lives and saved Anuradhapura from a blood bath. Without doubt his achievement can be recorded as the bravest incident of preventive action ever recorded in the history of the Ceylon Police Service.

In combating this force which, if properly led, would have taxed a full infantry battalion, Inspector Ranasinghe and his puny force of six men have enhanced the reputation of the Service and earned the gratitude and respect of the law-abiding sections of the public. It is a miracle that this police party is alive today.

I therefore very strongly recommend that these two officers be awarded the Ceylon Police Medal for Gallantry both in recognition of the services rendered by them and as an incentive to all other ranks of the Service.

S.W. O. de Silva
Inspector-General of Police.
Queen's House,
Colombo 1, 7th July, 1958.

Reference No. R.157/51

Sir,

I am directed by the Governor-General to inform you that, on the recommendation of the Honourable the Prime Minister, His Excellency has been pleased to approve of the award to you of the Ceylon Police Medal for Gallantry.

His Excellency has asked me to convey to you his warmest congratulations and his appreciation of the gallantry you displayed.

The announcement of the award will be published in the Ceylon Government Gazette on Friday, 11th July, 1958, and I am to request you to make no communication to the press regarding it before that date.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
N.W. Atukorala Secretary to the Governor-General
B. Weerasinge, Esq, A.S.P., N.C.P.
D.D. S. Ranasinghe, Esq, H.Q.I., Anuradhapura.

Note -

- (1) These Gallantry Medals will be presented at a Special Parade.
- (2) To be indexed under the above heading. Colombo 1, 12th July, 1958.

Glossary

‘Apey Aanduwa’ - ‘The Government is ours’

Bhikku - Buddhist monk

Chulu light - Rough and ready torch of dried coconut leaves

Dhana - Offerings to the monks

Goonda - Hoodlum, unemployable vagabond

Hartal - A mass disobedience movement

Lokka - The boss

Mahdal - Home-spun deep sea fishing nets

Satyagraha - Civil disobedience movement on the Gandhian pattern

Sri - A word connoting noble, holy or blessed

Upasampada - Ordination ceremony

¹ The delegation consisted of Messrs Stanley de Zoysa, S. F. Amarasingha (both Sinhalese Christians) and Raju Coomaraswamy (a Tamil Hindu).

² On February 25, 1958 the suburban ‘office train’ to Colombo was held up for two hours by a gang of men who lay across the track refusing to disperse until their friends who had been taken into custody by the Railway Security Officers had been released. The security men had raided a first-class compartment and discovered many passengers carrying third-class tickets. The Prime Minister ordered the men to be released forthwith and rebuked the railway management for having insufficient third-class accommodation.

³ On October 4, 1957 a party of ‘pilgrims’—mostly United National Party supporters—led by former Financial Minister J. R. Jayawardene, who were walking from Colombo to Kandy to invoke the blessings of the gods for their campaign against the Bandaranaike—Chelvanayakam Pact, was ambushed at Imbulgoda by a gang of men led by S. D. Bandaranayake, M.P. for Gampaha. A car had been placed across the road. The police would not allow the ‘pilgrims’ to proceed further. The Government party saluted Bandaranayake as the ‘Hero of Imbulgoda’.

⁴ These I O Us were all redeemed by the end of June.

⁵ The Home Ministry received at this time a gruesome souvenir from the Government Agent who was trying to wake the Central Government to the danger in the N.C.P. It was a heavy club studded with gramophone needles which had been laboriously set into the wood by a thug who obviously liked to see his victims suffer.

⁶ Later awarded the Ceylon Police Medal for Gallantry. See Appendix for official record of this officer's work.

⁷ The deputation was composed of: Messrs R. E. Jayatilleke, M.P., A. H. Macan Markar, M.P., Sir Razeek Fareed, M.P., Dr M. P. Drahama, M.P., Sir Arunachalam Mahadeva, Messrs Selwyn Sarnaraweera, Chairman, L.C.P.A., R. F. S. de Mel, Chairman, Sinhala Merchants' Chamber, Devar Suriya Sena, Stephen Samarakkody, J. Tyagarajah and Dr M. G. Perera.

⁸ 'A common political game, perfected in newly-freed Asian Countries where Expediency takes the place of Principle, and politicians spend their time watching, like surf-board riders, for the wave which is likely to carry them furthest.

⁹ 'When this was brought to the notice of the Competent Authority with a plea that the story should be scotched before it gathered further momentum, his answer was: 'The man who started that rumour is now in jail.'

¹⁰ It occurs to me that the Prime Minister himself would have fluffed this examination according to his evidence given at the Theja Gunawardane Trial at Bar in 1954 when he confessed in Court that he could not read Sinhalese fluently.

¹¹ At the Press Conference on the afternoon of May 28, the Competent Authority reported: 'A preliminary report from Mr Gunasekera de Zoysa, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs, sent from the Jaffna airport after meeting Mr P. Kandiah, M.P., states that there have been no Sinhalese deaths in the peninsula. 'A few Tamil deaths occurred when the police opened fire in connection with two incidents which took place the previous day. 'The Permanent Secretary will be making a full report to the Prime Minister immediately he returns.'

¹² Inspector Daya Ranasinghe was awarded the highest honour for gallantry in the police service—the Ceylon Police Medal. See Appendix for Police Gazette account of this episode.

¹³ Until very recently Queen's House servants referred to the Governor-General as Rajjuruwo (the King). This grated so much on the supra sensible ears of the Secretary, N. W. Atukorale, that he issued a general order laying down a new form of address: 'Utumwso' (The Noble One or the Supreme Being).

¹⁴ In a population of 9,000,000 there are over 1,000,000 Ceylon Tamils and over 1,000,000 Indian Tamils. Most Moors also speak Tamil.

¹⁵ see footnote 8

¹⁶ The police, with the aid of the army, had been assigned two years ago to raid a vast tract of jungle land where the villagers were suspected to have grown ganja plants from which a potent narcotic is derived. A Commission of Inquiry revealed later that the villagers had been subjected to inexcusable brutality.

¹⁷ NLSSP:Nava Lanka Sama Samaja Party—the Trotskyite Opposition party.
VLSSP:The Viplavakari or revolutionary Trotskyite party which forms the extreme Left Wing of the Government.
CP:Communist Party.
UNP:United National Party, which formed the previous Government.
MEP:Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, or Tile People's United Front, now in power.