

A

SHORT HISTORY

OF THE

LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY

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FOREWORD

This is a short history of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party produced in connection with the 25th anniversary celebrations of the party. Written by Leslie Goonewardene, it has been ratified by a special committee of the party appointed for the purpose. The committee is composed of N. M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva, Leslie Goonewardene, Edmund Samarakkody, Doric de Souza and P.B. Tampoe.

47, Drieberg's Avenue,
Colombo.

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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY

Chapter 1—The Early Period

PREPARATORY WORK

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party was founded on December 18th 1935 with the broad aims of Independence and Socialism, by a group of young people who had gathered together for that purpose.

The idea did not fall from the sky but had been maturing for some time. The only other parties that could be said to have existed at the time were the Ceylon National Congress and the Ceylon Labour Party. The Ceylon National Congress representing the interests of the Ceylonese capitalists, was following a policy of begging for constitutional reforms, with the aim of Dominion Status, in much the same manner as the Liberals in India. The Labour Party, which had played a progressive role along with the Ceylon Labour Union in the twenties in the first important awakening of Ceylon's working class, had degenerated into a one-man show, and in any case had nothing to do with Socialism. There was a void to be filled.

Just as the idea of the new party did not fall from the sky, so also the group of people who formed it did not suddenly gather together from nowhere. It was a grouping that had collected as the result of some patient work over a few years. The group that was the precursor of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party was first formed some time in the latter part of 1933. But one might go even further back to the

Wellawatte Mills Strike of 1932, the leadership of which had been provided by individuals who were later to become members of the group.

The group at the commencement numbered a bare half-dozen composed principally of students who had returned from abroad, influenced deeply by the ideas of Karl Marx and Lenin. But it gradually expanded. It might be of interest today to recall that N.M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva, Leslie Goonewardene, Philip Gunawardena and Robert Gunewardena were among the members of the original group.

Efforts were made to break into the working class field, and the group published for several months a Sinhalese paper entitled "Kamkaruwa" (Worker). In the trade union field the group came into head-on clash with Mr. A.E. Goonesinghe the reformist labour leader (Mr. Goonesinghe's influence, though on the wane, was to persist till the war period). Excepting the Wellawatte Mills, in this clash Mr. Goonesinghe was generally the victor. The young enthusiasts learned in the hard way that the working class does not lightly abandon its traditional leadership.

Efforts in the general political field were more successful. On the initiative of the South Colombo Youth League, the Suriya Mal Movement was launched in November 1933. A couple of years or so previously, in protest against the proceeds of Poppy sales on Armistice Day (November 11th) being used for the benefit of the British ex-servicemen to the detriment of Ceylonese ex-servicemen, a Ceylonese ex-serviceman, Mr. Aelian Perera, had started a rival sale of Suriya flowers on this day, the proceeds of which were devoted to help needy Ceylonese ex-servicemen. This movement was revived on a new anti-imperialist and anti-war basis.

Emblazoning the words "Peace" and "Freedom" on its banner the new Suriya Mal Movement came into being.

Young men and women sold Suriya flowers on the streets on November 11th in competition with the Poppy sellers, yearly until the second world war. The purchasers of the Suriya Mal were generally from the poorer sections of society and the funds collected were not large. But the movement provided a rallying point for the anti-imperialist minded youth of the time. Doreen Wickramasinghe (Mrs. S. A. Wickramasinghe) was elected first President of the Suriya Mal Movement at a meeting held at the residence of Wilmot Perera in Horana. Terence N. de Silva* and Robin Ratnam were elected Joint Secretaries, and Roy de Mel Treasurer.

The proceeds of the campaign were utilised for the publication of literature and the education of a child of a depressed community. The Suriya Mal workers also played an important role during the malaria epidemic of 1934-35 in which 125,000 died throughout the country. Bands of Suriya Mal workers encamped in the worst affected areas and did valuable relief work in the malaria-stricken villages.

In this early period, youth leagues were started in various places having as their aim the winning of complete independence for Ceylon. Anti-Imperialist propaganda was carried on under the aegis of the youth leagues. Noteworthy was the opposition organised to the campaign of the National Congress Board of Ministers to gain support in the country for their petition to Whitchall. This "Ministers' Memorandum" as it came to be known, instead of demanding even Dominion Status for Ceylon only asked for the transfer of more power to the elected Ministers. The Youth Leagues opposed the manoeuvre as an abject capitulation to imperialism. After three or four public meetings, in the face of opposition the Ministers dropped their campaign.

* Terence N. de Silva died in 1959

All this preparatory work paved the way for the formation of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. The first members of the party came principally from elements thrown up by the Youth Leagues and the Suriya Mal Movement.

THE PARTY IS LAUNCHED

The first manifesto of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party declared that its aims were the achievement of complete national independence, the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the abolition of inequalities arising from differences of race, caste, creed or sex.

It is of interest today to note that the partial demands raised at the time included the abolition of child labour, free school books, abolition of irrigation rates, a scheme of unemployment insurance, minimum wage, eight-hour day, rent restriction, slum clearance, the use of Sinhalese and Tamil for proceedings in lower courts and for entries in police stations and the gradual extension of this to all government departments, abolition of the headman system and nationalisation of imports of rice and petrol.

Membership of the party was open to those who subscribed to the party's aims and paid a subscription of 25 cents a month. Power was vested in an Executive Committee between annual conferences. Colvin R. de Silva was elected President at the inaugural meeting and Vernon Gunasekera was elected Secretary.

The Party succeeded in securing the election of two of its members, Philip Gunawardena (Avissawella) and N.M. Perera (Ruanwella) to the State Council in the General Elections of February—March 1936, Dr. S.A. Wickramasinghe, member for Akuressa in the First State Council of 1931, re-contested his seat as LSSP candidate in the General

Election of 1936, and lost. Leslie Goonewardene lost his contest at Panadura.

The securing of two seats in the State Council was an invaluable aid to the young party. The two State Councillors fully utilised the legislature as a forum to propagandise the policy of the party and to put forward its view on all important questions as they arose. Their advent was like a waft of fresh air. The walls of the chamber began to echo the cry of the oppressed, the grievances of the workers, the complaints of the rural population, the defiance of those who would not submit to imperialist subjection or capitalist and fendal exploitation and oppression.

The Sinhalese weekly "Samasamajaya", commenced on July 10, 1936, and edited by B. J. Fernando, also played a valuable role.* It continued to appear regularly till the press was seized and sealed up by the Government in 1940. The Tamil weekly "Samatharmam" was commenced in 1938. Its first editor was K. Ramanathan. Later T.E. Pushparajan became the editor.

BRINGING POLITICS TO THE PEOPLE

In order to appreciate and understand the nature of the impact made by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party on the political scene and the role it played in this first period, it is important first of all to realise that politics in the sense we understand it today did not exist at that time in Ceylon. Although universal franchise had existed from 1931, elections did not proceed on party lines, and political issues were hardly raised. Voters used to vote on caste, religious or personal considerations. Politics was really confined to the English educated few, and it was customary for public meetings to be conducted in English.

* B.J. Fernando was the composer of the international song of the Party,

In a sense it would be true to say that the Lanka Sama Samaja party introduced politics to Ceylon. Certainly it brought politics to the common people, employing a language and terms they could understand. Many words, especially in political terminology, which are in current use today in the Sinhalese language have acquired their meaning thanks to the Sama Samaja movement.

As a matter of fact, when the Lanka Sama Samaja Party was formed there were no accepted words in Sinhalese to describe the words 'Socialist' or 'Communist'.* That is how the word 'Samasamajaya' coined by Mr. Dally Jayawardena in the "Swadesa Mitraya" of that day to describe the word 'Socialist', came to be chosen. The new term had the added advantage of not being associated with the ideas of reformism that are attached to the English word "Socialist."

In the period 1935 to 1939, a number of reforms and measures of social amelioration are directly attributable to the agitation of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, both within the State Council and outside. Thus, for example a million rupees was set apart in 1936 for free meals for school children, a reform of the headman system was set going in 1937 by the abolition of the posts of superior headmen (that is, Ratemahatmayas, Mudliyas, as also Korales and Vidane Arachchies), and a resolution to abolish irrigation rates was accepted by the State Council in 1938 and implemented a year later.

In November 1936, a motion that "in the Municipal and Police Courts of the Island the proceedings should be in the vernacular" was accepted by the State Council and

* To give but one example the word "pakshaya" meaning 'party' used to be used loosely and incorrectly in the thirties to describe the words 'class'. It is the Samasamaja movement that popularised the correct word "panthiya" in this connection.

referred to the Legal Secretary. Needless to say, nothing was done about it. A similar fate attended a motion passed on the same day that "entries in police stations should be recorded in the language in which they are originally stated". These early efforts to make a beginning in the displacement of English as the language of administration thus went unheeded. The failure to tackle these matters in time was later to give this question of the state language such an explosive form as to threaten the very unity of the Ceylonese nation.

Similarly, another Samasamajist motion "not to grant any recruiting licences under any circumstances whatsoever" aimed at a ban on Indian immigration was debated and defeated in September 1937 on the specious plea that there was a shortage of labour in the plantations. This has never, however, prevented the very people who opposed this resolution from attacking the Samasamajists as being "pro-Indian" and "anti-Ceylonese" when they have defended the human rights of these plantation workers whom the capitalists themselves had brought from India.

It was about the same time as the formation of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party that a group of young socialists in India, under the leadership of people like Jayaprakash Narain, Ashok Mehta, M. R. Masani and Rammanohar Lohia, had launched the Congress Socialist Party in India. Fraternal relations were established between the two parties and it was probably partly as a result of this that a delegation of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party was invited to and attended the Faizpur Sessions of the Indian National Congress in 1936. In April 1937 Kamaladevi Chattopadyaya, a leader of the Congress Socialist Party and one of the most colourful figures in the Indian national movement, was the guest of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and addressed a large number

of meetings in various parts of the country on a national tour. This propaganda campaign helped the newly formed party to popularise itself.

THE BRACEGIRDLE EPISODE

It was towards the end April 1937 that there occurred an episode that led to the party receiving nation-wide publicity and which first established the party's reputation as an organisation which fights for democratic rights not only in words but also in deeds.

M.A.L. Bracegirdle, a young Australian, after completing his "creeping" on a British tea plantation, joined the the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and began to participate energetically in its activities. This was too much for the white sahibs of the plantation raj who considering their prestige was at stake prevailed upon the Governor at the time Sir Reginald Stubbs, to serve an order of deportation on Bracegirdle under a century-old law.

Bracegirdle was served with the order of deportation on April 22nd and given 48 hours to leave by a steamer on which a passage had been booked for him by the Government. The Party with the full concurrence of Bracegirdle decided that the order should be defied. On April 24th the steamer left without Bracegirdle, and there followed a man-hunt throughout the country, in which, despite all efforts of the police Bracegirdle successfully eluded arrest. In parenthesis it may be mentioned that the experience gained in hiding Bracegirdle was valuable for the party for the illegal and underground tasks of the war years.

In the meantime, the matter gained nation-wide publicity with public sympathy increasingly manifesting itself in favour of Bracegirdle. In the party May Day demonstration that

year there were placards declaring "We want Bracegirdle—Deport Stubbs". The Board of Ministers too began to feel the pressure of mass opinion and protested against the Governor's action which had been taken without even consulting the Minister of Home Affairs. After 11 days of eluding the police, Bracegirdle made a dramatic re-appearance at a mammoth rally in Colombo on May 5th; a couple of days later he was arrested.

But by now, legal preparations had been made. A writ of 'Habeas Corpus' was served, and there ensued a legal battle before a bench of 3 Supreme Court judges presided over by Chief Justice Sir Sidney Abrahams. The case created legal history. Mr. H. V. Perera, Ceylon's leading civil lawyer, volunteered his services free on behalf of Bracegirdle. In the end on 18th May order was made quashing the Governor's order of deportation, and Bracegirdle was a free man.

It should not be supposed, however, that the young Sama Samaja Party had an easy path to tread. From the commencement the Ceylonese bourgeoisie recognised in the Lanka Sama Samaja Party its real enemy. Sir Don Baron Jayatileke commenced the onslaught, acting on the theory, no doubt, that it was always better to nip a thing in the bud. He made it a point to attack the Sama Samaja Party at political and non-political meetings he addressed in various parts of the country, declaring that the Sama Samajists were out to destroy religion. One of the results of Sir Baron's propaganda was that the Lanka Sama Samaja Party began to receive requests for meetings from people in whom interest had been aroused by Sir Baron's attacks and who desired to hear the other side of the question! Needless to say, the party was only too glad to oblige.

Realising, no doubt, that verbal attacks were not achieving their purpose, the bourgeoisie decided that firmer measures were needed. From 1937 to 1939 a systematic effort was made to disrupt Samasamaja meetings not only by shouting and beating of tom-toms, but by physical attacks by drunken hoodlums armed with clubs and knives. Very often, in those days, holding a public meeting involved elaborate organisation for the defence of the meeting against such attacks. Many meetings resulted in open clashes. The Bulathkohupitiya and Homagama meetings in particular deserve mention as instances where the party showed its determination to defend the right of meeting. In the latter case, as late as February 1939, many were injured on both sides.

Another form of attack resorted to by the bourgeois opponents of the party was the publication of scurrilous literature against the Samasamajist leaders. One particularly indecent paper called "Sinha Handa" deserves special mention since it was edited by a particularly capable Sinhalese writer of repute who had prostituted his talents to serve his bourgeois masters.

THE TRADE UNION FIELD

After the launching of the party, efforts at unionisation of the workers met with greater success than before. Indeed the party was able to take leadership in the spontaneous island-wide 2-day strike of the motor workers that took place on the eve of the February 1936 General Election, against the recently promulgated Motor Laws which provided for the cancellation of driving licences for trivial offences.

Trade union work was, however, an uphill task in the face of the opposition of the reformist labour leader Mr. Goonesinghe, whose opposition went so far as to supply

blacklegs to employers to break strikes led by the Samasama-jists. Unionisation, however, went slowly forward among the bus workers, the Ratmalana Railway Workshop workers, and other sections of workers in private establishments. In this period the party provided leadership in strikes of workers of the Admiralty in Trincomalee, the Kolonnawa oil installation, the Colombo Commercial Co. at Hunupitiya, and at other places.

In 1938, however, unionization suffered a severe setback as the result of a marked growth of anti-Indian sentiment among the Sinhalese workers. Mr. Goonesinghe who had raised the anti-Indian cry in the Wellawatte mill strike of 1932 made a desperate effort to retain his hold on labour by an anti-Indian campaign. He was greatly assisted in this by Mr. J. L. Kotelawala (later Sir John Kotelawala) Minister of Communications and Works, who announced with a fanfare of trumpets that he was getting rid of all Indian workers working under the Government. The campaign to arouse racial hatred was a success. Many workplaces in Colombo employed also workers of Indian origin. With division in the ranks of the workers, union organizations collapsed, and it was a simple matter for the employers to impose their own terms on the workers in the workplaces. Even the strong Wellawatte Mill Workers Union was a casualty in this period when union organization reached a very low level. This was the first example of the successful use of communalism as an organised manoeuvre to disrupt the mass movement. These moods began to change only with the commencement of the war and the strike wave among the plantation workers.

The end of 1939 and the first half of 1940 saw the awakening for the first time of the workers of the plantations. A wave of spontaneous strikes spread throughout the plantations, commencing in November. At the start the issues

were generally trivial, such as a discontinuance or a transfer, but basically it was a struggle of the workers to win the right of organisation. There were two principal organizations working among the plantation workers, one the trade union organisation of the Ceylon Indian Congress, and the others, the All-Ceylon Estate Workers Union led by the Samasamajists.

In November and December the wave was more or less confined to the Central Province and was by and large under the leadership of the Congress. In this area it reached the zenith in the Mool Oya Estate strike, which was led by the Samasamajists. In this strike, on January 19, 1940, the worker Govindan was shot and killed by the police and became the first of a long list of martyrs of the working class in the plantations. As a result of agitation both within the State Council and outside, the Government was compelled to appoint a Commission of Inquiry. Colvin R. de Silva, who appeared for the widow of Govindan, was able to make a very effective exposure of the combined role of the police and employers in the plantation raj of the white man. The name of Veluchamy, Secretary of All-Ceylon Estate Workers' Union, is indissolubly bound up with the Mool Oya Strike.

But the raj of the white planters was beginning to crack. After Mool Oya, the plantation strike wave spread southward towards Uva, with the workers showing increasing militancy and determination. The strikes became more prolonged (the strike on St. Andrews' Estate, Talawakelle, continued for 3 months), more basic demands such as wage demands were increasingly raised, and the workers began more and more to seek the militant leadership of the Samasamajists.

When the strike wave reached Uva Province, the Samasamajists were in leadership. In a desperate effort to stem-

the tide, the Badulla Magistrate issued an order banning the holding of meetings. On a decision by the party N.M. Perera broke the ban and addressed a mammoth meeting in Badulla on May 12th. The police were powerless to act. Willie Jayatilleke, Edmund Samarakkody and V. Sittampalam* did invaluable work in the struggle in Uva.

The highest point in the entire struggle was reached on Wewessa Estate where the workers set up their elected council, the Superintendent agreeing to act in consultation with the Workers' Council. An armed police party that went to restore "law and order" was disarmed by the workers, and on the orders of the workers' council the rifles were returned to the policemen on their furnishing a signed receipt.

Finally, of course, the strike wave was beaten back by the police. This was facilitated by floods which cut off Uva from the rest of the country for over a week. And the police specially took their revenge on the heroic Wewessa workers by a literal armed invasion of the estate followed by a rule of terror which compelled scores of workers to seek refuge in the jungle for several days.

The militant leadership provided by the party made a deep impression among the plantation workers. But the party was never able to build on this goodwill because firstly, repression descended on the party immediately afterwards leaving the trade union field in the plantations free to the Ceylon Indian Congress; and secondly because even after the war, the measures of the Government against workers of Indian origin drove these workers quite naturally in the circumstances into the arms of the Ceylon Indian Congress.

* Died in 1945

Chapter 2—War and Repression

TROTSKYISM AND STALINISM

The Second World War, which commenced in September 1939, brought many changes for the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. But in the first place, it accelerated changes within it.

For some time past, most of the leaders of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party had been disturbed by certain international developments, such as the Moscow Trials and the Popular Front line of the Communist Parties of the West. They could not believe that the confessions in the trials were genuine and felt compelled to come to the conclusion that they were gigantic frame-ups. The line of the Popular Front, especially in Spain, appeared to be dictated, not by the needs of the Spanish Revolution, but by the foreign policy needs of the Soviet Government. The line of the National Front, prescribed for colonial countries, seemed to subserve the same aim. In other words, the Third (Communist) International, founded by Lenin in 1919 to give help and guidance to the socialist revolution throughout the world, had apparently degenerated into an abject instrument of Stalin's changing foreign policies. A careful reading of Trotsky's "Revolution Betrayed" (first available in English in 1938) also had a profound effect on the leaders of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party.

The support of the war for some weeks by the Communist Parties of Britain and France who were faithfully following the People's War line of the Popular Front and their abrupt change of line into one of opposition to the war, presumably on instructions from abroad, underlined the

need for an early clarification of the question within the Lanka Sama Samaja Party.

Accordingly the following resolution was presented to and adopted by the Executive Committee of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party: "Since the 3rd International has not acted in the interests of the international revolutionary working class movement, while expressing its solidarity with the Soviet Union, the first workers' state, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party declares that it has no faith in the 3rd International." 29 voted for, and 5 against the resolution. Among those voting against were S. A. Wickramasinghe and M. G. Mendis who had for some time, along with Jack Kotalawela, served as Joint Secretary of the party.

The clash between the Trotskyists and the Stalinists now came into the open in the party. Shortly afterwards, the Stalinists were expelled. This was possibly the first occasion in the history of party expulsions where the Trotskyists expelled the Stalinists, and not the reverse.

The Executive Committee of the party also adopted a new programme and constitution. Hitherto the programme of the party had been vague. Now a clear revolutionary programme was adopted, in line with the programme of the 4th International, founded by Trotsky in 1938. The old constitution had granted membership to all those who paid a subscription of 25 cents a month. The new constitution limited membership to those who paid a monthly subscription according to ability to pay, and who engaged in party activity as members in a party group or local organization. An effort was thus made to convert the party from a loose body of individuals into a fighting organization.

How timely the change was, is shown by the repression that descended on the party immediately afterwards. Further, one dreads to think what the position would have been if the Stalinists had remained within the party till 1941, when the Soviet Union entered the war against Germany. Their change of position from opposition to support of the war and their policy of branding as traitors those who opposed the war would have paralysed the party if they had been within it. As it was, the party entered the dark period of war repression armed with the ideological and organisational weapons needed for the tasks and problems it had to face.

THE UNDERGROUND PERIOD

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party had from the start characterised the war as an imperialist war and opposed Ceylon's participation in it. What this opposition to the war meant in practice was the prosecution of the class struggle in disregard of any adverse consequences that might result therefrom to the war effort. Furthermore, Hitler was marking time in the winter of 1939-40 and the war had not yet started in real earnest. Consequently perhaps our imperialist rulers still felt they could ignore the Sama Samaja Party.

However, the situation changed in the first half of 1940. On the one hand, the Samasamajists were proving to be a definite hindrance to the war effort with their militant leadership of the plantation workers' struggles. The strikes in Uva took place in April-May 1940. And then came the fall of Paris on June 13th. Within a week the Government acted.

Detention orders were issued on N. M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena, Colvin R. de Silva, Edmund Samarakkody

and Leslie Goonewardene. The party press was raided and sealed. Regulations were promulgated which made open party work practically impossible. J. C. T. Kotelawala was party Secretary at the time.

The Party, however, was not caught napping. The cover organisation of the party, of which Doric de Souza and Reggie Senanayake principally were in charge, had been active for some months.* N. M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena and Colvin R. de Silva were arrested on June 18th and Edmund Samarakkody on June 19th. But Leslie Goonewardene on prior instructions of the party, evaded arrest and went underground. The cover organisation of the party enabled him to work for a period of one year and three months till he left for India. Despite a prize offered for his capture all the efforts of the police to arrest him proved unsuccessful.

The party press was sealed and guarded. But the 'Samasamajaya', printed at the secret party press and produced at first on a two-page sheet, began to appear. The Tamil and English illegal sheets also appeared at irregular intervals. Illegal leaflets too were distributed.

On June 23rd a mass meeting called by the party to protest against the arrests of the party leaders and held despite a police ban, was broken up by the police. Eleven people, including Selina Perera, Reggie Perera and Boyd Wickremasinghe, were arrested and charged in this connection.

While on the one hand repression was being unleashed in this manner against the Samasamajists for their opposition to the war, it might be noted in parenthesis that the State Council assembled on June 27th and passed without a single

* Reggie Senanayake died in 1946.

dissentient voice a vote of Rs. 5 million as a contribution to the war effort of the Imperial Government. It should be added however that in 1941 when Mr. George E. de Silva brought a resolution in the State Council demanding the release of the Samasamajist detenus, the resolution was only just defeated, 14 voting for, 15 voting against and 8 declining to vote.

The reorganisation of the party in a manner suitable to the new, illegal conditions went forward. Special mention should be made of the indefatigable work under the most trying conditions of Henry Peiris who was the editor of "Samasamajaya" during the entire illegal period.* On April 20th, 1941, a secret conference, attended by 42 delegates was held. Leslie Goonewardene, who was in hiding, also attended this conference at which the new programme and constitution were adopted.

The party actively participated in the strike wave of the urban workers which commenced in May 1941 and affected the workers of the Colombo Harbour, Granaries, Wellawatta Mills, Gas Company, Colombo Municipality and Fort - Mount Lavinia bus route. This openly functioning section of the party was led by Robert Gunawardena, S. C. C. Anthonipillai, V. Karalasingham, K. V. Lourenz Perera and William Silva. A legal Sinhalese weekly, "Kamkaruwa", was published to aid these struggles, till the paper was ultimately banned by Admiral Layton. The English paper "Straight Left" was also published in this period.

In mid-1941 the war between the Soviet Union and Germany broke out, as a result of Hitler's treacherous attack. But the Lanka Sama Samaja Party stuck firmly to

* Henry Peiris died in 1959.

the view that this did not alter the imperialist character of the war waged by Britain against Germany (and later along with the United States against Italy and Japan as well.) It held that support of the war and postponement of the struggle for independence not only would constitute a betrayal of the struggle against imperialism but also would, in the last resort, be not to the advantage of the Soviet Union itself.

ESCAPE FROM JAIL

A sensation was caused throughout the country when on the night of 7th April 1942 the four detenus escaped from jail along with one of their jail guards, by name Solomon. Subsequent official inquiries were unable to establish how this jail-break succeeded. Today, 18 years later, there is no harm in making public the fact that this was not the first occasion when the detenus had left the jail. On two previous occasions also they had left the jail in the night for all night consultations with the party and had returned to jail before dawn. On this occasion, however, there was no return.

As was to be expected, the repression was intensified after the jail-break. Up to now, although the Lanka Sama Samaja Party had been compelled in practice to work as an illegal organisation, it had not been formally illegalised. It was now declared to be an illegal organisation. A new wave of arrests took place. Among those immediately arrested and detained under the Defence Regulations were Jack Kotelawala, Terence N. de Zilva, Willie Jayatilleke, P. Veluchamy, H.A.C. Wickremaratne, Boyd Wickremasinghe, Martin Silva and Stanley Mendis. There were, of course, many others arrested and charged for specific offences.

A large number of other warrants for arrest and detention were made, and with the failure to find the wanted persons, in addition to the detenus who had escaped, the following also were proclaimed and attachment of their property ordered : Leslie Goonewardene and his wife Vivienne Goonewardene, Selina Perera (wife of N.M. Perera), Kusuma Gunawardena (wife of Philip Gunawardena), Robert Gunawardena, Reggie Senanayake, Reggie Perera, V. Karalasingham, P.H. William Silva, S.C.C. Anthonipillai, Lionel D. Cooray and K.V. Lourenz Perera. Many of these people were subsequently arrested and detained.

Soon after the jail-break, the detenus left illegally for India, with the exception of Edmund Samarakkody, who stayed behind. At this time, the struggle for independence was brewing in India, and many other warranted party members also left for India to participate in the struggle. For, it was generally realised that the impending open revolt against imperialism in India was going to be decisive for the future not only of India but of Ceylon as well.

FORMATION OF THE BOLSHEVIK LENINIST PARTY OF INDIA

It should also be mentioned that for some time past the party had been in touch with Trotskyist groups in various parts of India, and had been playing an important part in bringing them together. Preparatory work had been done in this connection by V. Balasingham,* Doric de Souza, Bernard Soysa and later Leslie Goonewardene. In April 1942, the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India was formed, as a section of the 4th International, with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party as its Ceylon unit.

This organisational connection was to continue for some years till after the transfer of power in India in 1947 and in

* Died in 1944.

Ceylon in 1948, such an organisational connection ceased to have any meaning. The Ceylon party then became a directly affiliated section of the Fourth International.

The Ceylonese Samasamajists who went to India participated actively along with the Bolshevik Leninist Party, in the struggle for independence that commenced in August 1942 in India. Some of them underwent great hardships. A case in point is that of Hector Abeywardena who, released on parole from detention in Ceylon, crossed over to India disguised as a Christian priest, and later nearly died of smallpox in a remote village in Gujerat.

In 1943 the Indian police succeeded in arresting a number of the Samasamajists in India. Philip Gunawardena, his wife Kusuma and their infant child were arrested in Bombay and were kept in Worli jail for several weeks before being sent to Ceylon. N. M. Perera was arrested in Ahmedabad. Bernard Soysa spent 50 days in the Bombay police lock-up before being sent to Ceylon. Others arrested in 1943 were Lionel Cooray in Bombay and Robert Gunawardena, Reggie Senanayake and the ex-jail guard Solomon in Madras. V. Karalasingham, Allan Mendis, Doric de Souza, and S.C.C. Anthonipillai were arrested and detained much later. S.C.C. Anthonipillai and Allan Mendis were released from an Indian jail only in 1946, a year after the conclusion of the war. Colvin R. de Silva, Leslie Goonewardene, Vivienne Goonewardene and Selina Perera succeeded in evading arrest up to the end.

The arrested Ceylonese were ultimately brought back to Ceylon and placed in the detention jail at Badulla. Robert Gunewardena, whose leg had been broken by the Indian police while attempting to escape from custody, was admitted to the General Hospital, Colombo, where he was chained to

his bed and also guarded day and night. N.M. Perera, Philip Gunewardena and Edmund Samrakkody who had been arrested in Ceylon, were charged in 1944 with escaping from jail and sentenced to 6 months rigorous imprisonment.

Tribute should be paid to the numbers of unnamed Samasamajists who underwent imprisonment, police persecution and hardship in the war period. It is their revolutionary determination that kept the party going even in the darkest days. Special mention should be made of Hemasiri Silva and Daniel Weerasena who were sentenced to 6 years and 7 years imprisonment respectively. P. A. E. Perera, publisher of the Samasamajaya, was warranted and went into hiding. Ill, he entered hospital unknown. And dying there, his last words were "Long live the Revolution! Tell Comrade Robert!"

No account of the war period would be complete without something being said of the work of a group of worker members who concentrated their activities on organising the workers and giving them a militant leadership at a time when the Stalinists with every encouragement from the imperialists, were building their trade unions on the basis of support of the war effort. Needless to say, this type of work was very difficult. Being semi-open, it had to be conducted in constant danger of police raids and arrests.

This group was led by G. P. Perera (better known as Elephant Perera because of his leadership in 1942 of a 3 months' struggle of the workers of the Elephant cigarette company along with Selina Perera), and included among others T. W. R. (Rathu) Wijesinghe,* W. J. (Hospital) Perera, J. Wanigatunga, Thirathnadāsa (Bappa), George Perera (Chumbi), Samarawickrama, Ariyadasa, Kasi Udayam, David

* Rathu Wijesinghe died in 1958. † David Perera died in 1944.

Perera (Hoare David)[†] and Krishnan. It led several strikes including the hospital workers' general strike of 1944, and was responsible for the party capturing the leadership of the government workers' unions in Colombo.

With the conclusion of the war against Germany, public pressure for the release of the detenus increased, and on May 30th 1945 the State Council passed a resolution moved by Mr. A.P. Jayasuriya recommending the unconditional release of the detenus. On this occasion only two British nominated members voted against. However, the detenus were not to be released at once. At first efforts were made to persuade them to sign conditions. The detenus stoutly refused to give any such undertaking. Finally, it was after a two-day hunger strike by the detenus on June 18-19 that they were unconditionally released on June 24.

Some of the detenus had been released earlier on grounds of health, while some were under detention in hospital. When the gates of the Badulla detention prison were opened, those who still remained inside were N. M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena, Terence N. de Zylva, William Silva, H.A.C. Wickramaratne, Willie Jayatilleke, Reggie Perera, Martin Silva, P Veluchamy, S. Kulatilleke, B. Waidyasekera and S. B. Peiris. Colvin R de Silva, Leslie Goonewardene and Vivienne Goonewardene only returned to Ceylon in November, after the conclusion of the war with Japan, when warrants against them were withdrawn. Selina Perera stayed back to work in India as also did Anthonipillai.

The released detenus were hailed as heroes and given receptions throughout the country. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which its enemies had thought had been smashed by the repression, now emerged stronger than ever before and with a tremendous prestige.

Chapter 3—1945 to 1950

THE POST WAR UPSURGE

As happened after the First World War so also after the Second, resentment against the sufferings and privations of wartime as well as the new lessons learned from the experiences of the war years led in most countries to a powerful upsurge of the mass movement. Ceylon was no exception. Although the upsurge did not reach revolutionary heights as in several countries, the pent-up feelings of the masses burst forth in a variety of ways with the relaxation of the repressive restrictions of the war period.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party played an important part in giving guidance and direction to this upsurge. To be sure the biggest upsurge was in the working class movement. But it would be a mistake to suppose that this awakening was confined to the workers. It manifested itself in various ways among all sections of the common people.

The peasant cultivators of the countryside were chafing under the war-time regulation under which they were compelled to sell their surplus paddy to Government at the rate of Rs. 8/- per bushel. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party was quick to place itself behind the demand for the abolition of this war-time practice and for the raising of the price of a bushel of paddy. In late 1945 under its leadership there was

organised the All-Ceylon Peasant Congress which conducted an agitation in the rural areas on this question. The Hewagam Korale branch of this organisation launched a direct action struggle under which peasant cultivators refused to hand over their paddy to Government. Court action was filed against hundreds and some went to jail. In 1946 the Congress organised a peasant march to the State Council, which was a success. It was after this agitation that the then Minister of Agriculture, Mr. D.S. Senanayake substituted the system of purchase of paddy by CAP Societies for the old system of compulsory collections by Government.

It was also in this period that there occurred the free education struggle. In the middle of 1945 the State Council had adopted the Free Education Bill brought by the then Minister of Education, Mr. C.W.W. Kannangara. While the Lanka Sama Samaja Party certainly cannot claim credit for this piece of legislation it might be noted that, in spite of the disability of illegality, the party was not behind the times even on this question. While in jail in 1944 N.M. Perera wrote a small book entitled "Free Education" which urged the adoption of a system of free education in Ceylon.

Under the Bill, the managements of the various schools were given the option of coming into the scheme. While most schools came into the scheme, some chose to continue as fee-levying schools. There were a number of strikes of students in such schools (supported by the common people of the area) to compel the managements to enter the scheme and provide a free education for the children. The LSSP participated actively in this movement.

The existing State Council had been elected as far back as 1936 and had long since ceased to be representative of the people. With the example of Britain and other countries

holding elections even before the conclusion of the war, the case for an immediate general election in Ceylon was unanswerable. The leaders of the Ceylonese bourgeoisie, however, showed no appreciation of this need. The party accordingly placed itself at the head of the agitation for an immediate dissolution of the unrepresentative State Council and for fresh elections.

It was in this immediate post-war period too, that the United National Party was started. Hitherto the Ceylonese bourgeoisie had utilised the Ceylon National Congress as their political instrument. However, Mr. D. S. Senanayake, the most powerful leader of the Ceylonese capitalists, had left the Ceylon National Congress in the period of the war as a protest against the decision of the Congress at that time to admit the Stalinists into its fold. Further, the Ceylon National Congress had long since been a Sinhalese organisation, whereas Mr. Senanayake saw the need for having a national party including also the Tamils in order to increase his bargaining power in the forthcoming discussions with the British Government on constitutional reforms. And finally there was also the fact that the Ceylon National Congress, discredited in the eyes of the public, had been reduced almost to an empty shell. Accordingly, under the leadership of Mr. D. S. Senanayake the United National Party was launched in June 1946 in preparation for the General Election which was fixed for 1947.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party unhesitatingly characterised the new party as the political party of the Ceylonese bourgeoisie. It further described it as an agency of imperialism in Ceylon and warned the masses against placing the slightest trust in it. As the Lanka Sama Samaja Party had been the only political party in Ceylon to oppose the war of the imperialists, so also it was the only party in Ceylon in

this period to call upon the masses to fight intransigently against the United National Party as the arch enemy of the people.*

From that time up to now, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party can proudly lay claim to having been, of all political parties, the most consistent and determined opponent of the United National Party.

WORKING CLASS STRUGGLES

The end of the war saw a wave of workers' strikes. On September 19th 1945 there was a spontaneous strike of 10,000 Colombo workers who demanded to see the Board of Ministers. After a prolonged tramways strike, the strike spread to the harbour and other places in November. In these initial actions, most of the workers who participated belonged to unions affiliated to the Ceylon Trade Union Federation, controlled by the Communist Party. However, the political line of the Communist Party prevented them from giving a militant lead to the workers. Their role in these actions was generally the tailist one of trying to get the workers back on the promise of some minor concession.

On November 22nd the Samasamajist-led union of motor workers launched its island-wide bus strike. N. M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena, Somaweera Chandrasiri, W. J. Perera, George Perera and Leslie Goonewardene (who had just returned to Ceylon from India) were arrested and

* The Communist Party in this period characterised the UNP as a front rather than a party. While admitting that it had a reactionary leadership it nevertheless stressed that there were progressives in its ranks. This led it to decide on a policy that was in fact pro-UNP and anti-LSSP for the forthcoming election of 1947.

prosecuted for supporting a strike in an essential service. The strike was a success, and the most stubbornly anti-union section of the capitalists in Ceylon, namely, the bus owners, were compelled to make important concessions.

In this early post-war period the Lanka Sama Samaja Party re-commenced its trade union activity in cooperation with the Workers' and Peasants' Union of A. Gunasekera who at that time was the leader of a group known as the Radical Party.* The Ceylon Federation of Labour, which had been registered as a federation of unions by this group, was taken over by the Samasamajists. Unorganised workers sought unionisation under party leadership. Important unions, such as the Harbour and Dock Workers' Union, were formed as a result of the militant leadership given by the LSSP in the course of strikes. In the Jaffna peninsula, the organisations of the bus workers and other sections of workers, under the leadership of C. Tharmakulasingham, came over to the LSSP, giving the party for the first time a working class base in the North.† And finally several unions which had accepted the leadership of the Communist Party during the war, came over to the Samasamajists.

In a bid to avert the great struggle of the Government workers that was preparing under the leadership of the LSSP-led Government Workers' Trade Union Federation, in December 1945 the Government voted an extra Rs. 6 million to increase the wages of Government workers. But this altered nothing.

In 1946 at the tail end of a stubborn two months old strike of the bank clerks, the first General Strike took place.

* This group was under the influence of the ideas of M. N. Roy of India.

† C. Tharmakulasingham died in 1949.

On October 16th the Government workers struck. The railway strike was well-nigh complete and of itself brought many establishments to a standstill. The strike was soon extended to the Harbour, the Gas Company, Municipal workers and various private firms. The official figure given by the Government of the number of strikers was only 24,000. But the real figure was probably twice as large. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party, controlling as it did the unions of the Government workers, who were the backbone of the strike, was in effective leadership of the strike. But a central strike committee was formed to lead the strike, composed of representatives of all participating unions and parties.

For several days the Government refused to negotiate. But when the strike continued with undiminished strength, gradually bringing economic life to a standstill, the Acting Governor on October 21st, agreed to meet a deputation of the Government Workers' Trade Union Federation. The deputation was permitted to bring along one adviser with them and the Federation chose N.M. Perera for this function.

However, on the following day, shortly before the time fixed for the interview with the Acting Governor, N.M. Perera was arrested by the police, quite clearly for the purpose of preventing him from participating in the negotiations. The workers' delegation went to Queen's House and met the Acting Governor, but refused to come to a settlement in the absence of N.M. Perera. In the end N.M. Perera had to be released and negotiated a settlement together with the delegation of the Federation. The Government workers' strike was settled on the promise of several important concessions. However, some of these promises were not honoured, and provided the reason for the Second General Strike of the following year. After this settlement, settlements were negotiated with the employers in other sectors.

The conducting of the General Strike of 1946 enormously increased the prestige of the party generally and particularly among the workers. It accelerated greatly the process of integration of the party in the working class and its development into a working class party in the true sense of the word.

The Second General Strike, taking place at the end of May and early June 1947, was not such a success and ended in defeat. It came about as a result of the broadening out of a strike of engineering workers, the government workers coming into the struggle because of the unfulfilled promises of the previous year. But the strike of the railway workers was not complete and the trains continued to run. On the other hand the Government clerks came out on strike under the leadership of their organisation, the Government Clerical Service Union. Also, the unions of the Communist-led Ceylon Trade Union Federation came out in greater strength than the previous year. As previously, a central strike committee was appointed to conduct the strike. However, on this occasion the attitude of the Government as well as private employers was much stiffer, and they refused to negotiate.

On June 5th, a procession of several thousands of strikers, for which permission had been duly obtained, was proceeding with N M. Perera at its head, when a large force of police barred its passage at Dematagoda and baton charged it. N M. Perera was knocked down and beaten while on the ground. The police also fired 25 rounds into the demonstration, as a result of which 18 were injured and 1 killed. The martyr was V Kandasamy, a Government clerk.

This act of repression, while it roused the resentment of the masses generally, had a damping effect on the strike itself. After a few days most of the clerks had returned to work.

The workers stuck out longer, but in the end sections of them too returned to work. Ultimately the strike was officially called off. The strike was not only a defeat, it was a smash-up. Thousands of Government clerks, Government workers and workers in private employment were victimised. A Public Security Bill giving the Government various repressive powers, had also been rushed through the State Council in the latter days of the strike.

After the defeat of the General Strike of 1947 the trade union movement entered a period of ebb. This slump was to continue for some years. As it had done on the occasion of the formation of the United National Party, so also in this situation the Lanka Sama Samaja Party correctly discharged its responsibility to the mass movement. While drawing the political lessons of the defeat, it warned the workers against adventurist struggles and explained that this was now a period in which the workers had patiently to rebuild their shattered organisations in preparation for the next wave of struggles.*

THE SPLIT IN THE LSSP

In the latter period of the war, after the escape of the leaders from jail in 1942, a faction struggle developed within the party. There were no differences in regard to programme or policy. The differences centred mainly around organisational questions. One faction called itself the Bolshevik-Leninist faction and declared that the other faction was attempting to dilute the party and convert it into a loose organisation. The other faction, calling itself the Workers,

* This warning was specially important at the time because the Communist Party, acting in the interests of contemporary Soviet foreign policy, was engaged in adventurist actions.

Opposition, declared that the party machine had been captured by a group of intellectuals who were obstructing the expansion of the party among the working class.

After the release of the leaders from jail and the re-commencement of open mass activity the split became open, and two groups began to function in the name of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. While N.M. Perera, Philip Gunawardena, and Robert Gunawardena were among those who associated themselves with one group, Doric de Souza, Edmund Samarakkody, Bernard Soysa and William Silva were among those who associated themselves with the other group. The Bolshevik Leninist Party of India, of which the LSSP was a unit, continued to recognise as its Ceylon unit the organisation with which it had maintained contact throughout the war years, and on October 8, 1945 took the step of expulsion of N.M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena from the party. When this decision was announced in the newspapers on behalf of the Bureau of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India by a letter signed by Colvin R. de Silva and Leslie Goonewardene, the split in Ceylon became definitive, and, for the time being not capable of healing.

The split in the LSSP was very unfortunate and prevented the LSSP from reaping the full benefits of a period in which the general popularity and prestige of the Samasamajists was very high after its principled and fearless opposition to imperialism in the war years. This fact was, indeed, realised generally, and a short-lived attempt at unity was made at the end of 1946 which failed after a few months. However, one gain achieved during this short period of unity was the nomination of candidates for the forthcoming General Election. Fortunately both parties adhered to this list of candidates, so that no clash occurred between the two Trotskyist parties in the general election of 1947.

Some time after the failure of this early attempt at reunification, the LSSP which was recognised by the BLPI, realising the confusion arising from two parties using the same name, and recognising that the other and larger party was considered in fact by the masses to be the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, decided to change its name to Bolshevik Samasamaja Party.

The months and years that followed, however, only demonstrated that there were absolutely no principled political differences between the two organisations and that this division in the ranks of the Trotskyists was not only being exploited by rivals in the political field but was proving a distinct advantage to the class enemy. The Gampaha By Election in 1949, in which both the Trotskyist parties contested, led not only to an easy victory for the United National Party, but to unfortunate physical clashes between the two Trotskyist parties. The desire for unity grew in both parties, and in early 1950 a joint council of both parties was set up, to co-ordinate the public activities of both parties with the perspective of unification within a period of six months.

Before the middle of the year the Lanka Sama Samaja Party by a majority decision and the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party unanimously decided to unify under the name of Lanka Sama Samaja Party and at a Joint Conference held on June 4th 1950 formal unification was achieved. T. B. Subasinghe was elected Secretary.

Unfortunately many of those who had voted in the LSSP against the unification proposal split away and under the leadership of Philip Gunawardena set themselves up as a separate organisation using the same name. The capitalist press, which has always opposed the party, utilised the situation to try to give the party a new name, namely Nava (New)

Lanka Sama Samaja Party in order to create the impression that it was a new party and not the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. History, however, has long since given its verdict on this question. And the verdict has been against the editors of the capitalist newspapers.

THE 1947 ELECTIONS

The 1947 General Election was held under the new Soulbury Constitution. Held from August 23rd to September 20th that year, it took the shape of a struggle against the United National Party. The United National Party for its part, recognising in the L.S.S.P. its principal enemy, concentrated its attack on the Samasamajists. Huge posters depicting burning temples, churches or mosques, declared: "Save the Country from the Samasamaja Fire". The main burden of UNP propoganda was that the Samasamajists would destroy religion.

The masses, however, closed their ranks in a struggle to defeat the UNP. Even the Communist Party, which had entered the election campaign supporting the UNP against the LSSP, was compelled to modify its position.*

A noticeable feature of the campaign was the enthusiastic manner in which particularly those workers who had participated in the General Strike a few months earlier threw themselves into the election struggle. The very defeat of their economic struggle appeared to have driven them to seek a political solution of their problems. Especially the demand for the re-instatement of the victimised workers in

* The Communist Party put forward a candidate against N. M. Perera at Ruanwella, for example, but later withdrew their nomination. This candidate finally contested as an Independent.

the General Strike played an important part in the election. This demand, in fact, continued to be an issue in all subsequent elections, up to and including the General Election of 1956.

As stated earlier, the two Trotskyist parties did not clash, the division of seats arranged during the brief period of unity being adhered to by both organisations. Both parties contested a total of 38 seats. The LSSP won 10 seats, while the other LSSP (which soon after the elections became the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party) won 5 seats. The UNP won 42 seats, the CP 3, the Ceylon Indian Congress 7, the Tamil Congress 7, and Independents 20. The LSSP thus emerged as the second largest party, next to the UNP.

The result of the election had not really been a victory for the UNP. Although it had won 42 out of a total of 95 elected seats, it did not seem possible for it to obtain a working majority. The situation was really resolved by the Governor, who called upon Mr. D.S. Senanayake to form the government. With 6 nominated members added to the UNP figure, the total came to 48, and after that it was not difficult to get the support of several Independents, and later of the Tamil Congress.

In the Parliament of 1947 the role of leadership of the Opposition devolved in fact on the LSSP as the second largest party. However, it was not till the unification of the two Trotskyist parties in 1950 that it was possible, with the cooperation of the M.Ps. of the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party which was then obtained, to secure for the leader of the LSSP Parliamentary Group the official position of Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

In the election of Senators by the House the LSSP was able to secure the election of W.K. Jinadasa, and the B.S.P.

of D.W.J. Perera as senators. It is worthy of note that the first motion moved by D.W.J. Perera in the Senate was a motion calling for the abolition of that body!

The new mass position gained by the LSSP in the post-war period brought with it its own organisational problems. We had remarked earlier that during the war the party had altered its constitution so as to limit its membership to those who engaged in some regular activity as members of a party group or organisation. On the other hand this raised the problem of maintaining adequate contact with a very wide layer of conscious supporters of the party both in town and countryside. The party organisation was far too small for this task.

A solution to this problem was found in practice by the form of organisation called the Sama Samaja Youth League. This is a peripheral organisation of the party and is composed of people who accept the leadership of the party but do not have to conform to the strict rules which apply to party membership. These leagues are formed on a territorial basis and establish close ties with the people of the area by taking up local issues.

The first conference of these Youth Leagues was held in 1949 when Philip Gunewardena was elected President and Basil Silva Secretary of the All-Island Congress of Sama Samaja Youth Leagues. These youth leagues were first formed principally from the members of the peasant organisation to which we had occasion to refer earlier. After the unification of the two Trotskyist parties in 1950 this Sama-samaja Youth League Movement grew by leaps and bounds with a wide network reaching even remote parts of the country. It must be stated that in all political struggles that have taken place in the past ten years, whether they be election struggles or direct struggles like the Great Hartal of 1953, the Youth Leagues have played an exceedingly important role and have served as the main link between the party and the masses.

Chaptet 4—Ebb and Revival

CONSOLIDATION OF THE RIGHT

The years following 1947 witnessed a consolidation of the forces of the Right under the leadership of the UNP and a stagnation of the mass movement. There were several reasons for this.

In the first place in February 1948 there occurred the transfer of power by the British. Ceylon acquired the status of a Dominion by the Governor becoming a constitutional head without arbitrary powers and the Ceylon Parliament becoming a sovereign body. This change of policy on the part of British Imperialism had been brought about by the mass struggles for independence that had taken place in the countries of South East Asia and more particularly in the neighbouring British possessions of India and Burma. The bourgeois leaders of Ceylon, represented the matter as evidence of the success of their policy of co-operation with the imperialists. Whether the people accepted this explanation or not the fact remained that political power had indeed been transferred to Ceylon, and this helped to strengthen the UNP.*

In the second place, the boom conditions, particularly in relation to rubber, that came during the years of the Korean War, placed the Government in a financially good position

* The LSSP took the position that although legally power had been transferred, independence was a fake one on account of the economic domination of Ceylon's economy by the imperialists, the continuation by Britain of military bases in Ceylon, and the existence of a secret defence agreement, explicit or implied, with the British Government. This position has undergone modification over the years, with the virtual evacuation of the bases under the MEP Government of 1956—59 and the absence of evidence of a secret defence agreement.

and enabled it to grant many concessions to the masses in this period. The reduction in the price of rationed rice to 25 cents a measure in 1951 and the increase in the price paid by the Government to the peasants for their paddy, from Rs. 8/- to Rs. 9/- a bushel in 1951 and from Rs. 9/- to Rs. 12/- in 1952, are deserving of special mention.

Finally it should be noted that in this period for the first time in Ceylon's history there was built a bourgeois party with a mass following. The Ceylonese bourgeoisie, which is predominantly a plantation bourgeoisie, had slept during the war years when its big brother in India was leading an oppositional movement to imperialism. It was awakened only after the war when it saw the upsurge of the masses with the Samasamajists in the vanguard and instinctively recognised the threat that this represented to its very existence. Earlier, the bourgeois leaders of Ceylon, distrustful and a little afraid of the masses, had generally avoided mass political meetings. Now they began to compete with the Leftists in open air rallies, even though in most cases the masses had to be provided with free transport to attend them. Mass membership drives were made, and a stream-lined electoral machine was set up. The lack of self-sacrifice in the rank and file workers was compensated for by the funds which national and foreign capitalists were only too ready to contribute. The Ceylonese bourgeoisie, scared into activity by the "Red Danger," and utilising all the advantages that accrued to it from being in control of the state machine, built the United National Party as the bastion of capitalist and imperialist interests in Ceylon. They were also responsible for the many reactionary features of the Soulbury Constitution which loaded the dice against working class parties in parliamentary politics.

It was in this period too that the Government introduced a series of repressive legislative and administrative measures calculated to cripple the mass movement and the workers' movement in particular. Even before the elections of 1947, towards the end of the unsuccessful General Strike of that year, the Government had rushed through the Public Security Ordinance and the Police Amendment Ordinance. Soon after, in the early period of the first Parliament, the notorious administrative regulation 208 B which placed a ban on all public servants engaging in political activity of any sort, was passed. In 1948 an amendment to the Trade Union Act placed a number of restrictions on the trade unions of public servants including even a denial of their right to form a federation of unions of such public servants. Soon after, came the Citizenship Acts and an amendment to the Constitution which denied the franchise to several hundreds of thousands of plantation workers of Indian origin who had exercised the vote since 1931, and imposed such conditions as made it impossible for all but a small fraction of these workers to obtain Ceylon citizenship. Needless to say the Lanka Sama Samaja Party opposed all these repressive and anti-democratic measures of the Government.

We noted earlier that the Trotskyist parties had united in 1950. This was an important occurrence. It gave new hope and courage to thousands. The united Lanka Sama Samaja Party grew in numbers, strengthened its organisation and expanded its activities. But all this could not reverse the historical ebb that was taking place. This was illustrated in the Balangoda By-Election in April 1951, where the LSSP candidate fought the UNP candidate and was defeated by a very large majority.

Nor was the situation materially altered by the split-away of Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and his group from the

UNP in July 1951. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party was formed almost immediately afterwards as a Centre Party with a programme of moderate reforms. Whether the newly formed party broke more support from the Left or from the Right is a matter for speculation. But of this there can be no doubt. The split-away from the UNP did not succeed in reversing the general trend to the Right.

THE 1952 ELECTIONS

It was in this context that the General Election of 1952 took place. With the sudden death of Mr. D S. Senanayake in March 1952 and the succession to the premiership of his son, Mr. Dudley Senanayake, the latter decided to seek a mandate from the country, and fixed the General Election for May 24th, 26th, 28th and 30th.

As early as November 1951 the LSSP had written to the SLFP asking for a meeting to discuss the elimination of contests in the General Election which was even at that time considered a distinct possibility. No reply was at the time received to this letter. However, with the dissolution of Parliament, representatives of the two parties met for the above-mentioned purpose. It was not found possible to avoid a number of clashes, and the discussions were, generally speaking, unsuccessful. But it was decided to issue a statement pointing out the quite large number of seats in which clashes had been avoided.

Discussions with the Communist Party were even less successful. At this time the Communist Party was working in a united front called the CP-LSSP United Front, which had been formed with those LSSP'ers who, under the leadership of Philip Gunawardena, had split away at the time of the unification in 1950. The discussions with the CP-LSSP

United Front consisted largely of an effort to see whether programmatic agreement was possible. This was found to be not possible.*

The Party contested the elections with a 14-point anti imperialist and anti-capitalist programme under the slogan of a Samasamaja Government. This slogan, however, did not have anything but a propaganda value, since only 40 seats were contested out of a total of 95. As for the UNP, realising that the issue of religion which they had raised in 1947 would no longer work except among the Catholics, they concentrated on the Indian question. Their main attack on the Left generally and the LSSP in particular was that the Samasamajists were pro-Indian and would betray Ceylon to India.

The elections resulted in a big victory for the UNP, which won 54 seats, thus obtaining a clear majority in Parliament. Whereas in the 1947 elections 98 of its candidates had obtained 751,432 votes, in the 1952 elections 81 candidates obtained 1,026,025 votes. The SLFP contested 48 seats, won 9 seats and obtained a little over 3½ lakhs of votes. The LSSP contested 40 seats, won 9 seats, and obtained a little over 3 lakhs of votes, that is to say, practically the same number of votes as were obtained by the 38 candidates of both the Trotskyist parties in 1947. The CP LSSP United Front contested 19 seats and won 4 seats, obtaining 134,528 votes.

Many reasons have been advanced to account for the victory of the UNP in 1952, such as the disfranchisement of

* Programmatic agreement was not possible, because the United Front's aim in the elections was the creation of a "democratic government." In the elections the CP-LSSP United Front supported SLFP candidates against candidates of the LSSP.

nearly 200,000 workers of Indian origin, the clash between the anti-UNP parties of the Centre and Left, the better organisation of the UNP, and the sympathy for the new Prime Minister after the death of his father. While all these factors were present, some more important than others, it would be incorrect to ignore that the principal political factor was a noticeable turn to the Right on the part of the voters.

The LSSP and the SLFP had each won 9 seats. But the position of Leadership of the Opposition which the LSSP had held in the first Parliament, now went to the SLFP, the M.P's of the CP-LSSP United Front backing the candidature of Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike for this post.

The UNP victory naturally had a dampening effect on the masses generally. It had repercussions within the party too, as we shall see later. Some of the weaker elements in the party began to wobble. A good example of this was the case of W. Dahanayake, M.P. for Galle (and later to become a Prime Minister of Ceylon) who had to be expelled from the party for indiscipline. He broke an express direction of the Central Committee by welcoming and garlanding the UNP Prime Minister, Mr. Dudley Senanayake, on the occasion of his visit to Galle.

THE GREAT HARTAL

Soon after it came into power the UNP Government of 1952 found it necessary to impose certain burdens on the masses. The price of sugar was increased and a cut was made in the rice ration. The LSSP was not slow to take up these questions and conduct an agitation among the masses. As a protest against the cut in the rice ration N.M. Perera presented, as a first instalment, a petition with 50,000 signatures collected by the party and youth league organisations.

In 1953 the UNP Government proceeded still further with its economy drive, placing all the burdens of its financial difficulties on the backs of the masses. Rail fares and postal rates were increased, the free mid-day bun given to school children was stopped; and most serious of all, the price of rationed rice was increased at one fell stroke from 25 cents to 70 cents a measure! Mass resentment was all the stronger against this last mentioned action because the masses remembered very well that one of the important propaganda points in the UNP election campaign of the previous year had been the fact that it was supplying rice at 25 cents a measure.

The LSSP took the lead in the agitation against these measures. Meetings were held in all parts of the country, leaflets were distributed, and demonstrations were staged. Mass organisations and institutions like local bodies, feeling the pressure of the masses, began to pass resolutions demanding a reversal of these policies.

When it became clear that the Government was not budging from its position, the LSSP took the lead in inviting the other anti-UNP parties to consider the question of direct action in the situation. At these discussions it was finally decided to call on the masses to observe a 1-day hartal as a protest. On that day black flags would be hoisted, children would not go to school, employees would not go to work, shops would be closed, and people would generally desist from their normal pursuits, observing the day as a day of mourning. In the end, of all the political parties that had associated themselves with the agitation, in addition to the LSSP, only the CP-LSSP United Front and the Federal Party remained when it came to a question of action. The SLFP took the position that it was not opposed to the idea of a hartal in principle but was not convinced that the people

of Ceylon had come to a stage when they could do such a thing. The Ceylon Indian Congress was prepared only to go as far as the holding of meetings on that day, but not to engage in strike action. Only the LSSP, the United Front and the Federal Party remained to conduct the action. But, with the support of the masses, this proved to be sufficient.

Agitation was stepped up, an appropriate date was decided on and the trade unions and other mass organisations were prepared for action. The date finally decided on, namely, August 12th was not made public too early. The Government took counter measures in an effort to intimidate the masses. State employees were warned that they would be dismissed if they did not turn up for work, cooperative stores were ordered to keep their doors open, the military were paraded on the streets to frighten the people, the government-owned radio as well as the capitalist press screeched their propaganda in an effort to discredit the campaign, and every pressure that could be brought to bear by the state machine and the capitalist class was utilised to make the hartal a failure. One capitalist newspaper actually went so far as to anticipate events by putting out its morning edition with a banner headline announcing "Work Goes on Today."

The hartal, of course, was an even greater success than had been anticipated. The workers struck, transport was disorganised, and economic life came to a standstill in the towns. In the rural areas, the masses set up road blocks and disorganised telegraphic communications. The strike in the plantation areas was partial on account of the non-participation of the Congress.

The movement reached its height in the coastal areas of the Western and Southern Provinces. Under the leadership of Samasamajists, in Egoda Uyana the masses stopped and literally "captured" a train, in Waskaduwa one mile of railway line was removed by men, women and children in the night, and in the Southern Province, boulders were rolled on to the roads by the people, which were so large that, after the hartal, the police had to use dynamite to blast them because they were too heavy to move. The hartal, planned for 1 day only was officially called off by the participating organisations the following morning.

Let this be said to the credit of the masses. Violence they did use, in their wrathful protest against the Government which had cheated them. But this violence was directed, not against persons, but against inanimate objects such as railway lines, buses, telegraph posts and the like, in order to disrupt communications. In contrast to this, the violence of the Government was directed against persons. The police and military fired on the people, killing nine. In Gasworks Street, Colombo, young Edwin, a member of the Pettah Sama Samaja Youth League defied alone an order to disperse, opening his red shirt, baring his breast and inviting the military to shoot. This they did, and Edwin fell, riddled by bullets. He died on the way to hospital.

Thousands were injured as a result of shootings and baton charges, or arrested and detained in jail. An Emergency along with a curfew was declared on the 12th afternoon, which lasted for several weeks. The printing presses of the LSSP and CP were sealed under the Emergency powers. And hundreds of cases were filed against individuals throughout the country.*

* The Lanka Sama Samaja Party, conscious of its responsibilities, saw to it that a free defence was supplied by the party in these cases. Happily, it was possible to secure acquittals in most cases.

But the masses had shown that they were not prepared to take the blows of the capitalist government lying down. In a period when the UNP Government appeared to be all-powerful, the masses had seen the power of their own strength. The Great Hartal marked the turning point in the ebb of the mass movement. It shattered the myth of the invincibility of the UNP and prepared the ground for the defeat of that party in the elections of 1956. Further, the hartal was the first mass political struggle in Ceylon. It revealed the revolutionary strength of the masses and helped to re-inforce the self-confidence of revolutionists.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party will always be justly proud of the role that it played in the hartal. Eschewing sectarianism it sought and obtained the cooperation of all those prepared to join the struggle, and the hartal was called in the name of the Joint Committee of all those organisations. There is no gainsaying, however, that in the action itself, the effective leadership was in the hands of the LSSP. Specially heroic was the role of the thousands of Samasamaja Youth Leaguers who led the militant actions of the masses in town and countryside on August 12th.

THE SPILT OF 1953

After the decisive victory of the UNP in 1952 moods of discouragement began to grow in the party. This was also a time when the victory of the Chinese Revolution had evoked a tremendous admiration throughout South East Asia. In this situation the political ideas of Stalinism commenced once again to gain ground within the party. The first sign of this appeared at the Special Conference of October 1952.*

* It has always been the practice of the LSSP, as a democratic party, to hold conferences regularly and also whenever the situation demands it. After the unification Conference of 1950, there were party Conferences in February 1951, December 1951, October 1952, October 1953, April 1955, February 1957, July 1959, April 1960 and May 1960, making a total of 10 Conferences in the past 10 years.

At this conference a minority resolution sponsored, among others, by T. B. Subasinghe, Henry Peiris and William Silva, declared that in the elections the party should have put forward the slogan of a Democratic Government which would have meant "at its lowest level a Bandaranaike Government" and "at its highest level a Government by a Sama Samaja majority". It also took the position that the party should "enter into the closest possible agreement and cooperation with the CP and Philip Group in the trade union and political fields."

This resolution was defeated at the Conference, which decided that the party should strive for a "united front with the CP, the Philip Gunawardena group and the CIC" not on a comprehensive political programme but "on a programme related to the present needs and consciousness of the masses". With regard to non-working class parties like the SLFP, the Republican Party and the Federal Party, it was decided that the attempt should be to draw them into united action on specific issues.

In line with the decisions of the Conference the party conducted united front talks with the CP and LSSP United Front in 1953. The talks failed in July of that year because the Lanka Sama Samaja Party was not prepared to give up its right to criticise the Government of the USSR, the Eastern European countries and China, when it considered such criticism was necessary in the interest of the working class movement. In spite of the failure of the negotiations the party decided to work for united action wherever this was possible.

It was clear, however, that the difference in the party was growing, and arrangements were made for the resolution of the question through a party conference after a thorough

discussion in the party of two resolutions stating the two points of view. All that happened in this connection demonstrates very well the democratic methods of functioning which have become a tradition of the LSSP.

Articles in support both of the resolution of the leadership and that of the "opposition" were freely published in the Internal Bulletins which were distributed to the entire membership. Discussions were organised in the party locals, a representative of one side going on one day and of the other side on another day, to explain the two different points of view. And at the Conference itself held in October 1953 equal time was apportioned to the speakers of each side.

The resolution of the Political Bureau on the national situation was passed, receiving 259 votes, while the minority resolution was lost, receiving 125 votes. Thereupon, the supporters of the minority led by William Silva walked out of the Conference, splitting away from the party. In other words, the democratic process had worked so completely that those who had differences of a fundamental nature with the party realised this themselves and left of their own accord.

The party lost a third of its membership in that split, and its enemies greedfully imagined that the Lanka Sama Samaja Party would not recover from the blow. But as in the past, so also on this occasion the Lanka Sama Samaja Party showed that this was far from the case. To be sure, on account of the split the party was unable to reap the full benefits, politically and organisationally, of its role in the hartal of August 12th, 1953. But within a year the party had made up its losses, demonstrating that the Lanka Sama Samaja Party is not just another party, but fulfils a definite historical need of the mass movement in Ceylon.

In contrast with the rapid revival of the LSSP, what happened to those who split away? They tried to hold together, but they succeeded in doing this only for a short time. It was not long before they scattered. Eventually some of them went into the organisation of Philip Gunawardena, others into the Communist Party, while yet others left politics or steered clear of affiliation to any political party.

1953—1955

The period from 1953 onwards saw a gradual revival in many fields. In the local government elections of 1954 the party for the first time participated in a large way, and was able to assume the administration in 7 Village Committees 3 Urban Councils and the Colombo Municipal Council.

Unfortunately, in the local government elections even a no-contest agreement could not be obtained with CP-LSSP United Front. As far back as June 1952 the LSSP had taken the initiative in trying to get the United Front to fight the then impending Colombo Municipal Council elections on a joint programme with the LSSP. All local government elections were, however, postponed at that time by the UNP Government. However, even in the 1954 elections it was not possible to come to any agreement because of the insistence of the United Front that full political agreement should be arrived at.

One of the results of this attitude was that even when N. M. Perera became Mayor of the Colombo Municipal Council in August 1954, the cooperation of the Municipal Councillors of the CP-LSSP United Front was not forthcoming. On the other hand, the UNP Government pursued a policy of obstruction in relation to the Mayor, and not much positive result could be achieved. After a little over a

year, with the crossing over of a CP Municipal Counciller to the side of the UNP, the Mayoralty went to the UNP.

It was in this period commencing from 1954 that the mercantile employees embarked on a series of well organised struggles in which the recalcitrant Employers' Federation was compelled to negotiate and grant concessions. These struggles reached their high-point in the General Strike of Mercantile employees of March 1956, just prior to the General Elections. These successful actions did much to revive the confidence of the workers and pave the way for stable unions capable of real collective bargaining.

The wresting of the leadership of the Ceylon Mercantile Union away from the labour boss, Mr. Goonesinghe, was accomplished after the General Strike of 1947. In this process as well as the subsequent building of this union into one of the most powerful trade unions in Ceylon, the role of P.B. Tampoe deserves mention.

Since the war, the party had agitated for the establishment of diplomatic and trade relations with the socialist countries, and the China-Ceylon Rice and Rubber Agreement that was concluded in 1952 constituted a victory for this policy. In 1953 the party conducted an agitation for the conducting of this trade entirely through state channels.

In 1954 the party established relations with the Asian Socialist Conference and Colvin R. de Silva attended the meeting of the Bureau of that organisation in Tokio as a fraternal delegate. However, this connection was destined to be short-lived. When the Asian Socialist Bureau insisted on the party disaffiliating itself from the 4th International as a condition for the continuation of this connection, the party politely but firmly informed that organisation in March 1955 that this was out of the question.

The party contested the Alutnuwara by-election in May 1955. The UNP won the seat. But in spite of the backwardness of the area and the fact that both the SLFP and CP also contested, the party acquitted itself creditably, coming second.*

The CP - LSSP United Front broke up into its two component parts at the beginning of 1955 as a result of internal dissensions. The party signed a united front agreement with the LSSP led by Philip Gunawardena in April 1955, under which the two organisations agreed to cooperate to the maximum extent possible. A joint council was set up and a united May Day rally was held. But the agreement was not to last. With the failure, later in the year, to come to an agreement on the allocation of seats for the forthcoming General Election, the agreement died a natural death.

* The voting was as follows :— UNP - 5,291, LSSP - 2,177, SLFP-964, CP-504.

CHAPTER 5 — THE NEW ERA

THE LANGUAGE QUESTION

1956 saw the dawn of a new era. This new period was characterised not only by an increased consciousness among the masses with regard to their economic rights, but even more by a cultural renaissance among the Sinhalese. This renaissance took the form principally of an effort to elevate the position of the Sinhala language in the state and society and also of an attempt to revive the customs, traditions and arts of the Sinhalese and to restore Buddhism to the place it had occupied in past history. Unfortunately, however, on the question of the Sinhala language, which was the most important question, the demand took the form of a movement to make Sinhala the sole official language to the exclusion of Tamil, which is spoken by a quite considerable minority.

In April 1955 the political resolution adopted at the Party Conference had stated as follows :— “ The potentiality of this new factor in our politics (the language problem) has not in fact been grasped by our party thus far. We have no doubt seen the swabasha question as a question of national unity, but we have not sufficiently grasped the necessity or the potentialities of advocating it in the form and as a means of the struggle for the completion of our national independence. The party will certainly have to take up the swabasha weapon much more as its own instead of leaving it in wrong and reactionary hands.”

True, even after the Conference the party did not sufficiently grasp the importance of the question and make a determined effort to work according to the spirit of this

resolution. But even if it had done so, to put it at its lowest, it is extremely doubtful that the party could have altered the course of subsequent events. For, the movement represented by "Sinhala Only" became, not only a movement for raising the status of the Sinhala language to the status of an official language, but also a movement against the Tamil minority. This movement was fed, not only by historical factors but also by economic competition between the two communities particularly in relation to jobs. The fact that no mass struggle for independence had taken place, fostering a common bond of Ceylonese consciousness in the two communities, made such a development all the easier.

The natural leadership of this movement of cultural renaissance among the Sinhalese went to the SLFP, which in 1955 changed its language policy from Sinhalese and Tamil as state languages to one of Sinhala as the sole official language. This leadership was further consolidated when, shortly before the General Election of 1956, the SLFP combined with the LSSP of Philip Gunawardena to form the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party was the only party with a base among the Sinhalese that stood firmly right to the end by its policy of both Sinhala and Tamil as official languages. Even the Communist Party latterly changed its position on this question.

In October 1955 a public meeting held by the party on this question in the Colombo Town Hall was attacked by a hostile crowd with brickbats and bombs, while the police stood by.* The police finally moved into action only to baton charge and disperse those who were leaving the

* Reggie Mendis lost his left hand through the bursting of a bomb.

meeting after it had concluded. Both friend and foe have expressed their admiration of the party's devotion to principle. But there is no gainsaying that the party has paid a heavy price for its stand. It lost heavily among the Sinhalese masses. And although it has won the sympathy of wide sections of the minorities this has far from compensated for the losses.

The party's position on the question of citizenship of workers of Indian origin on the plantations has also cost the party a price, but the effect of this has been principally in the up-country areas. However, the party has never ceased its opposition to the unjust citizenship laws, and has adhered to its position that those who are permanent residents who desire to make Ceylon their home should be granted citizenship. (The corollary of this is, of course, that the others should become Indian citizens, so that there is no category of "stateless" people left.)

As a revolutionary socialist party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party could not have acted otherwise. For, as distinct from opportunist politicians to whom power is an end in itself, to the LSSP power is only a means to an end. That end is socialism. And it knows that socialism cannot be built except on the basis of the unity and willing cooperation of the masses of all the communities that inhabit Ceylon. And that unity and cooperation can only be achieved by a correct attitude to the problem of the minorities.

THE U.N P. DEFEAT OF 1956

Realising that the principal task facing the country in the forthcoming elections was the defeat of the United National Party, the party quite early took the initiative in calling for talks with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, and in

September 1955 a No-Contest Pact was signed between the LSSP and the SLFP. In accordance with the situation prevailing in the country a majority of seats was assigned to the SLFP.

Shortly before the elections the SLFP formed a front with certain other organisations like the LSSP of Philip Gunawardena, the Basha Perumana, and even individuals, called the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (M.E.P.), for the purpose of the elections. After this, the No.-Contest Pact with the LSSP was partially broken by MEP candidates not belonging to the SLFP contesting the LSSP in several seats assigned to the party. The party, however, conscious that the task was to defeat the UNP, did not aggravate the situation by any attempt at reprisals.

The election campaign became a veritable mass struggle against the hated capitalist UNP. UNP leaders going to election meetings were greeted with black flags and buns strung up in a row (to illustrate the withdrawal of the free mid-day bun given to school-children.) And, to add to the anti-capitalist sentiments of the masses, in the Sinhalese areas there was the new factor represented by the language question. The UNP, at a party conference held immediately prior to the election, had itself changed its language policy to one of Sinhala only. But this action was only greeted by the masses with derision. They were firmly convinced that what the UNP really stood for was English only!

The elections resulted in a rout of the UNP. The principal significance of the election result lay in the fact that for the first time the masses had broken away from the leadership of the big bourgeoisie. The UNP which had put forward 76 candidates won only 8 seats securing a total of

738,551 votes. The MEP, which had put forward 60 candidates, won 51 seats, with 1,046,362 votes. The LSSP which had put forward 21 candidates, won 14 seats, polling 274,204 votes. The Federal Party, with 14 candidates won 10 seats, polling 142,036 votes. And the Communist Party, with 9 candidates polled 119,715 votes, winning 3 seats.

The LSSP took its seats in the Opposition and, as the single largest party in the Opposition, the Leadership of the Opposition fell to it. However, at the commencement, the LSSP defined its attitude to the new MEP Government as one of "responsive cooperation." This attitude however changed to one of opposition very soon, when the Government introduced its "Sinhala Only" Bill. This was the occasion for minor riots. But in 1958, when a Pact which the Prime Minister, Mr. Bandaranaike, had concluded with the Federal Party broke down, there were widespread riots and killings, followed by a period of Emergency which lasted several months. For a number of months political life was at a virtual standstill.

In its three and a half years of office the MEP did have certain achievements to its credit. It nationalised bus transport and the Colombo Port. It introduced the Paddy Lands Act and the Multi-Purpose Co-operatives. It started the National Provident Fund. To all practical interests and purposes it took over the naval and air bases from the British, It established diplomatic relations with the Socialist countries. It gradually re-instated the Government employees dismissed after the General Strike of 1947. And it reversed the anti-trade union policy of the UNP Government. The LSSP solidarised itself with these progressive acts.

However, there was plenty on the debit side as well. The nationalisations were not the success that was expected because the Government was not prepared, in spite of the repeated insistence of the LSSP, to give the workers a share in the management of nationalised concerns, preferring to run them on bureaucratic lines with the same old capitalist managerial methods. The reforms in agriculture could not be properly implemented and the new co-operatives could not forge ahead because of the absence of planning and co-ordination and because of opposition within the Government itself to these measures.

Workers' problems were not faced up to and tackled, but constantly postponed, leading to widespread strikes. An anti-democratic Public Security Amendment Act was passed giving extraordinary powers to the Prime Minister. And no attempt was made to introduce even the beginnings of a planned economic development. In 1959 the Prime Minister announced that it was not proposed to take up the question of the nationalisation of the plantations for another 10 years. Finally, Sinhalese communalism and Tamil communalism which were roused to a high pitch by the policies of the Government itself and by the public declarations of many of its leaders, resulted in widespread rioting and Emergency rule, which threatened the unity of the country and brought the normal administration practically to a standstill. Even to think of economic development in such conditions was not possible. Such is the irony of history. The very question which more than any other had helped to bring the MEP Government to power proved to be the biggest obstacle in the way of the progress of that Government,

THE TRADE UNION UPSURGE

The victory of the MEP in April 1956 was greeted with joy by all sections of the masses. But no section was happier than the workers. Having suffered under the anti-union policies of the combined forces of the employees and the Government, the workers welcomed the advent of the MEP Government as ushering in a new era for the workers.

The new Government itself declared that its policy was to encourage the growth of trade unionism. Whether this policy was effectively translated into action is a different matter. Shootings and killings of striking workers demonstrated that the police at least were following a different policy. But the workers took the Government at its word, and the period from 1956 onwards saw an unprecedented development of trade unionism in Ceylon.

At first the workers did not wish to embarrass the new government by strikes. Although their wage demands were acute in a situation where the cost of living was rapidly rising, they waited patiently for over a year in the hope that the Government would take measures that would grant them relief.* The Government, however, postponed all these questions.

Finally, driven to desperation, the Government workers, organised in the LSSP-led Government Workers' Trade Union Federation, launched a two-day strike in November 1957. It was a General Strike of railway

* The only major strikes in this early period were the strikes of the dock workers. And even these strikes were sparked off in September 1956 by the Harbour and Dock Worker's Union, controlled by Philip Gunawardena, a Minister in the MEP Government.

workers and spread into other sections of government workers too. A number of demands were won, including a Rs. 17-50 Special Allowance and the securing of permanency or temporary monthly paid status for thousands of casual workers.

The widespread floods of December 1957 brought the strike wave to a temporary halt, but at the end of February a large number of workers in engineering firms, hotels, shops and certain other establishments in the private sector, belonging to the unions affiliated to the LSSP-led Ceylon Federation of Labour went on strike. The principal demand was the Rs. 17-50 Special Allowance.

In April of that year a big strike was called by the CP-led Ceylon Trade Union Federation. The majority of strikers were those engaged in the tea and rubber packing trades in Colombo. A strike of the Government clerical employees was also called at the same time. While the police attacked the striking clerks the armed forces paraded the streets in an effort to intimidate the strikers. It was only after a vehement protest by the Ceylon Federation of Labour that the armed forces were taken off the streets.

The wave of workers' struggles came to an end only in the latter half of May with the sudden outbreak of communal rioting and the declaration of a State of Emergency. But in a few months, even before the Emergency was lifted, isolated workers' strikes were taking place. And the middle of 1959 saw further economic struggles, some of them big strikes like the strike in the harbour, conducted by the LSSP-led United Port Workers' Union, and the strike of the mercantile employees called by the Ceylon Mercantile Union.

As distinct from economic struggles a one-day political strike that took place on March 3rd 1959 deserves special mention. An amendment was introduced in Parliament to the Public Security Act, giving extraordinary new powers to the police and armed forces if the Prime Minister is of opinion that the public security is endangered or such danger is imminent. The LSSP-led Ceylon Federation of Labour took the initiative in convening a meeting of representatives of all the trade union centres and principal trade unions. This conference, composed of the Ceylon Federation of Labour, the Government Worker's Trade Union Federation, the Ceylon Workers' Congress, the Democratic Workers' Congress, the Ceylon Mercantile Union, and a number of other unions, finally decided on a one-day protest strike on March 3rd. There was no question of course of the unions led by the SLFP or Philip Gunawardena group participating in an action against the Government, while the CP-led Ceylon Trade Union Federation, although it was against the Bill, was not prepared for action on this issue.

When this anti-democratic piece of legislation came before Parliament, the party Members of Parliament, in order to demonstrate the extent of their opposition and to alert the country to the dangers inherent in the Bill, adopted obstructionist tactics and had to be forcibly removed from the chamber of the House of Representatives on February 12th with the aid of the police.

As was to be expected, the Government, the Press, the Radio, as well as the unions led by the Communist Party, the SLFP and the Philip Gunewardena group did everything they could to sabotage the strike. The March 3rd action as a strike was only a partial success. But it fully succeeded

in its purpose, which was to register a working class protest in an emphatic manner against a reactionary and anti-democratic piece of legislation.

The period commencing with the formation of the MEP Government in 1956 was one in which, generally speaking, the influence of the party among the masses declined. The principal factor contributing to this result was the language question of which mention was made earlier. In the local government elections at the end of 1956 the party suffered reverses outside Colombo, while in Colombo the party suffered a defeat that was in the nature of a rout. Its group in the Colombo Municipal Council was reduced to 3, while 3 sitting members lost their seats to MEP candidates.

It is worth recording that in the national disaster caused by the floods at the end of 1959, the Sama Samaja Youth Leagues lost no time in despatching numbers of volunteers to some of the worst affected areas for relief work. Several relief camps were opened, especially in the North Central Province, and the youth leaguers played a role reminiscent of the role played by the Suriya Mal workers in the malaria epidemic twenty five years earlier.

It is also worth mentioning that in this period the party sent two delegations to visit and study conditions in China and Yugoslavia. The party delegation to China, numbering five, visited China in 1957, and a delegation of two visited Yugoslavia in 1959. These visits enabled the party to obtain a better knowledge of the concrete and varying problems facing these countries in their march forward to socialism and of the methods they were employing to solve them. But this was not all. On the one hand the visits constituted a demonstration by a Trotskyist party of its solidarity with workers' states and their valiant efforts on the road to socia-

lism. On the other hand, in these countries the visits may have done something to help to dispel the false notion that Trotskyists are incapable of building mass parties.

In May 1959, Philip Gunawardena, Minister of Agriculture and William Silva Minister of Industries, resigned from the Government as a protest against the decision of the Prime Minister to remove from their charge important departments of which they had up to then been in control. This was a sequel to strained relations that had been developing between them and the right wing in the Cabinet. A small group splitting away with them did not affect the Government majority in the House of Representatives. However, important and unforeseen events were soon to take place to bring about the downfall of the Government.

THE PRESENT PERIOD

On September 25th, 1959, an assassin shot the Prime Minister. Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. The following day he succumbed to his injuries and the Leader of the House at the time, Mr. W. Dahanayake, was sworn in as Prime Minister. The first reaction of the entire nation to the tragedy was one of shock. But as time went on, public dissatisfaction began to grow with regard to the manner of investigation into the circumstances of the tragedy. Within Parliament and outside the Lanka Sama Samaja Party took the lead in bringing many matters to light, in criticising official apathy and in demanding a full inquiry into the political conspiracy behind the assassination.

The Dahanayake Government was not destined to last long. After a few weeks the new Prime Minister unceremoniously dismissed his SLFP Ministers, formed a new party with some of the Right Wing SLFP'ers and, not having a

majority in Parliament, dissolved Parliament and arranged for a General Election.

Like the General Election of 1952, that of March 1960 was one in which each political party made its own independent bid. Unable to come to programmatic agreement with either the Communist Party or the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (which name was taken over by the organisation of Philip Gunawardena) the LSSP made its own independent bid for power, fighting 100 seats (out of a total of 151) on an anti-capitalist programme.

The results were as follows. The UNP, putting forward 127 candidates won 50 seats, polling a total of 901,082 votes. The SLFP, with 108 candidates won 46 seats, polling 654,757 votes. The LSSP, with 100 candidates won 10 seats, polling 325,250 votes. And the MEP, with 89 candidates, won 10 seats polling 322,794 votes. True, this was the highest number of votes polled so far at a General Election by the party. Even in the General Election of 1947 the combined votes of the Trotskyist parties had amounted only to 317,213. But there was no getting away from the fact that the election result was a defeat. It was also clear that the wave of Sinhalese communalism represented by the cry of "Sinhala Only," though not as powerful as in 1956, was still an important factor and prevented large numbers of anti-capitalist minded people who would otherwise have voted for the LSSP from voting for the LSSP, which took the position of making Tamil also an official language. The Indian question was also a question which adversely affected the party in upcountry areas.

Very soon after the election results were known, Mr. Dudley Senanayake, the leader of the United National Party, the largest single party, was called upon by the Governor—

General to form a Government. While the formation of the UNP Government was greeted with jubilation by the propertied and privileged strata of society, Ceylonese and foreign alike, to the toiling masses the day of the return to power of the hated UNP was like a day of mourning. The only ray of hope was that the UNP was still a minority government not commanding a majority in Parliament. In this situation the LSSP bent all its efforts to secure the downfall of the UNP Government as early as possible, doing everything it could to stiffen the ranks of the Opposition in the face of blandishments from the side of the UNP till the date when the vote on a motion of Confidence would be taken. The UNP Government was defeated on the vote on the Address of Thanks to the Throne Speech.* The Governor General, instead of calling upon the SLFP Leader of the Opposition to form a Government, gave in to the request of the UNP Premier to dissolve Parliament and hold a fresh election.

Once again the LSSP, realising the needs of the situation, entered into a No-Contest and mutual support pact with the SLFP and the CP, and, as in 1956 laid the basis firmly and truly for the defeat of the UNP in the General Election of July 1960. The results of the March election had shown that the masses by and large had chosen the SLFP as their main weapon to defeat the UNP. The results also demonstrated that very large sections of the masses, especially in rural areas, considered the SLFP too to be a leftist party capable of radical anti-capitalist measures. For them, this had to be tested out in experience. Accordingly, under the electoral agreement, while the SLFP contested 98 seats, the LSSP contested only 21, thus paving the way for the

* The MEP remained neutral in the decisive vote, in keeping with the line that it put forward of a National Government, which could only have meant a Government under the leadership of the UNP.

formation of a SLFP Government after the defeat of the UNP. However, the programme of demands put forward by the party in this election campaign was identical with what it had put forward in the March election when it had fought under the slogan of a Samasamaja Government.

In spite of the complete unity of the propertied classes and their utmost efforts, aided by the state machinery which was under the control of the UNP, the UNP was defeated in the July General Election. Although its 128 candidates polled 1,145,607 votes it won only 30 seats. The SLFP won 75 seats, polling 1,011,661 votes. The LSSP won 12 seats polling 214,693 votes. A SLFP Government was formed immediately afterwards with Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike as Prime Minister.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party, while functioning as an independent group bound neither to the Government Party nor the Opposition Party, today adopts a position of general support of the Government, holding itself free to criticise the Government as well as vote against it where it disagrees. This support it will continue to give so long as the Government in line with its socialist professions, subserves the needs of the mass movement for socialism.

This is a short, indeed a very short, history of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party during the first twenty five years of its existence. Twenty five years is a short period in history. But it is long enough a period for one to discover the programme, the character, the physiognomy and the traditions of a party. The attentive reader would have discovered many such features which have become a part of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. In particular he could not have failed to note its irreconcilable opposition to imperialism and capitalism, its passionate defence of democratic rights and

its sincere regard for democratic processes, its socialist internationalism as well as its deep desire for a real national unity forged on the mutual trust of the different communities who inhabit our country, and last but not least its revolutionary faith in the capacity of the masses to achieve.

The history of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party shows that its path has not been a smooth one. There have been times when its enemies predicted that it would not rise again. But they were proved to be wrong. On the other hand, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party has also had its victories. Its history contains its chapters of glory. But inspiring through those episodes may be, the most glorious chapters have yet to be written.

