V

THE FUTURE OF PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

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General Questions

After more than twenty five years of its working in our stagnant economy and conflict-ridden plural society challenged from many sides by extra-parliamentary forces, the question as to Parliament's appropriateness is most relevant. Put another way, it will not be out of place to ask whether Parliament has in fact been a failure.

The answer to these questions lies in our inquiry into what Parliament was intended for. Did those who agitated for it seek to imitate Westminster or did they wish it to be a genus of its own transformed into a Ceylonese version of the foreign model? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the opponents of Parliament are unable to provide a local alternative sprung from the genius of our own people. Whilst in the neighbouring subcontinent Jayaparakash Narayan and those like him may sing the virtues of village government (*panchayati* raj), there is no evidence of a nationalist effort in Sri Lanka to adapt the historical council of village adjudication, the *gansabha*,[1] into an effective instrument of contemporary government. In other words Parliament in the Ceylonese setting is just another term for a legislature to which is responsible a cabinet of ministers under the leadership of the Prime Minister. Elections to this legislative body take place within a system of electoral demarcation that places a premium on area, sparse population and therefore ruralism and conservatism[2]. We have deliberately preferred the cabinet system to the presidential type or any other form. Therein lie clues to the answer to our question.

It is questionable whether the prerequisites for the successful functioning of parliamentary government exist.

An elastic economy that can absorb social discontent is not available. Although the liberal system of social welfare that has been built into the system is so onerous

1. For an instructive essay on the subject, see R. K. W. Goonesekera, "The Eclipse of the Village Court" in *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 138-154.
2. Sections 40 to 44 of the 1947 Constitution. These have been more or less reproduced in Sections 76 to 81 of the Republican Constitution of May 1972.

that governments find it increasingly burdensome, it does help to cushion shocks that might otherwise have endangered the foundations of the state.

The relative cultural homogeneity that preceded Parliamentary democracy in Britain is absent. But the Sinhalese Buddhist ethos of tolerance does help overcome in limited ways the militancy and rigidity of Sinhalese language and Sinhalese Buddhist extremists. This tolerance helps produce an atmosphere for accommodating the demands of minority groups. In this way, extreme elements on both sides are inhibited from gaining the upper hand. But the fact of Buddhist tolerance is only a marginal consideration and does not in all situations act as a moderating factor.

Agreement on the fundamentals of the state is very necessary. It is the absence of such agreement that made the United National Party (UNP) governments of 1947-1952 intolerant of the main opposition which comprised the traditional Marxist parties, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP)[3] and the pro-Soviet Communist (CP), and *vice versa*. With the rise of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's social democratic Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) as the major oppositional force after the general election of 1952, a measure of acquiescence resulted between the two major parties. Since then the SLFP and UNP and their respective partners, inclusive of the traditional Marxists, have worked the state apparatus on the understanding that there is a commitment to constitutional government. There are wide areas of conflict on the essential details of what are considered fundamentals but there lies always the assumption that these could be resolved within the existing framework. Extra-parliamentary forces no doubt seek to challenge the efficacy of Parliament and even to question its validity.[4] The most serious challenges came from the unsuccessful attempt at a coup d'etat by right wing officers in the armed forces and the police in January 1962 and, in April 1971, from the Marxist Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, People's Liberation Front). But these very challenges have in effect helped in various ways to correct administrative and social deficiencies that otherwise could have hindered Parliament. Following 1962 a far-reaching reorganisation of the armed forces and the police was effected. After April 1971, Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike's SLFP-led left-centred United Front (UF) coalition government responded by putting through a number of important land reforms. There have been extra-parliamentary protests as well from the Tamil Federal Party (FP), the Marxist-oriented trade unions and on occasion even from the UNP and the SLFP when in opposition. These have however helped to clear the air and have at other times produced necessary changes within Parliament.

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3. Until 1950, the LSSP was splintered into the Bolshevik Lenininist Party of India which later took the name, Bolshevik Sama Samaja Party, and itself. In 1950 the rift between the two groups was healed and a merger occurred. Further splits followed this merger.

4. See Chapter 6, "Challenges to the Political Order" (pp. 192-227) in Robert N. Kearney, *The Politics of Ceylon* (*Sri Lanka*) (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1973) and H. A. I. Goonetileke, *The April* 1971 *Insurrection in Ceylon: A Select Bibliography* (*July* 1973) (Louvain, C.R.S.R., 1973).

A predominantly two party or bi-polar system with an electorate which is experienced and is willing to nominate a government and not merely return a legislature is conducive to the proper functioning of Parliament. During 1931-70, the Ceylonese electorate had experience of nine general elections, the electorate tending to become increasingly literate with free education (the literacy rate has ranged between 70 to 80 per cent). Up to 1956, Sri Lanka seemed to follow the "one-party dominance" pattern.[5] But signs of this eroding away were already evident following the 1952 general election, when the SLFP emerged as a credible oppositional force.[6] After the general election of 1956, with the defeat of the UNP by S.W. R. D. Bandaranaike's SLFP-led coalition, the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP, the People's United Front), what might be called a coalitional two party system emerged. Apart from March 1960, when the political scene was confused after the assassination of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the electors have rejected incumbents and replaced them with elected governments with clear majorities.

The Imitation of Westminster

At independence, a conscious effort was made to imitate the British House of Commons. Not only were British conventions incorporated in the 1947 Constitution[7] but the privileges and practices of the House of Commons were made part of the Constitution.[8] Mr. Speaker until 1970 and even after [9] was more or less a carbon copy of his counterpart in Westminster and continues to rely on the accepted authorities on British parliamentary procedure, Erskine May and Gilbert Campion, as sources for rulings and as guides to the work of the House.

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5. For further information see Rajni Kothari, "The Congress 'System' in India", *Asian Survey*, 4 (December 1964), pp. 161-73 and W. H. Morris-Jones, "Dominance and Dissent: Their Inter-relations in the Indian Party System," *Government and Opposition*, I, (August 1966), pp. 451-466.

6. See my "Oppositional Politics in Ceylon (1967-1968)" in *Government and Opposition*. Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 54-69. For a detailed overall analysis, see Calvin A. Woodward, *The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon* (Providence, Brown University Press, 1969). Also his, "Sri Lanka's Electoral Experience: From Personal to Party Politics," *Pacific Affairs*, Winter 1974-75, pp. 455-471.

7. For example Section 4 (2) of the 1947 Constitution stated that "all powers, authorities and functions vested in His Majesty or the Governor-General shall, subject to the provisions of this Order and of any other law for the time being in force, be exercised as far as may be in accordance with the constitutional conventions applicable to the exercise of similar powers, authorities and functions in the United Kingdom by His Majesty...."

8. For example Section 27 (1) of the 1947 Constitution in referring to the "privileges, immunities and powers" of Senators and Members of Parliament specified that there should not "exceed those for the time being held or enjoyed by the Common House of Parliament of the United Kingdom or of its Members". In actual practice they more or less approximated to those of the British House of Commons.

9. After the general election of May 1970, Mr. Speaker declared that he would maintain his party affiliations unlike his predecessors who renounced them as soon as they were elected to the office. However Mr. Speaker continues to maintain impartiality in the conduct of proceedings in the National State Assembly in accordance with the best traditions of the British Speaker.

Even after the "revolution of 1956" members on both sides of the House often quote from Dicey, Anson, Berriedale Keith, Jennings, Laski, Eugene Forsey and S. A. de Smith to sustain opposing positions on consitutional controversies.[10]

Till 1956, and even for some years after that, the principal language of debate in the House was English.

What was more the physical arrangements of the House which were semi-circular under the earlier constitution were altered so as to resemble the British House of Commons with Government and Opposition facing each other across the floor. The objective of course was to encourage a confrontation of two great parties.

Until its abolition in 1971 the Senate played its role in true House of Lords style, generally inactive when the conservative UNP was in office and even when the social democratic SLFP ruled. When it tended to become obstreperous after the victory of Mrs. Bandaranaike's SLFP-led UF in 1970, it was legislated out of existence. However there was never any agreement on the question of a second chamber, even at the time of independence. The island's political leaders did not want the insitution. This was clearly evidenced in the debates in the State Council on the Sri Lanka Bill for a constitution providing for full responsible government, and in the Draft Scheme for a Constitution that the Board of Ministers submitted to Whitehall.[11] It was one of the strikingly British impositions brought *via* the Soulbury Constitution.

The Republican Constitution of May 1972 is in its essentials once more a copy of Westminster, although there are, of course, differences in detail. In theory all power is concentrated in the unicameral National State Assembly. In practice, however, power emanates from the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers. The same kind of cabinet dictatorship that Ramsay Muir alleged existed in Britain[12] is now by implication and otherwise constitutionally enshrined in the Sri Lankan situation. The National State Assembly still adheres to the procedures of the British House of Commons[13] and its members have deliberately preferred the abbreviation MP rather than MNSA and are legally referred to in this way.[14]

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10. See S. A. de Smith, *The New Commonwealth and its Constitutions* (London, Stevens, 1964) pp. 77-105.

11. Sessional Paper XIV of 1944, also referred to as the *Draft Scheme* of the Board of Ministers.

12. See his *How Britain is Governed* (London, 1930). Also Humphrey Berkeley, *The Power of the Prime Minister* (London, Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1968).

13. Section 37 (2) of the Republican Constitution states that the Standing Orders of the previous legislative body, the House of Representatives, will continue in force until the National State Assembly otherwise provides. The Standing Orders of the House of Representatives followed very closely those of the British House of Commons. Further, Section 38 (1) states that "the privileges, immunities and powers of the National State Assembly and of its Members shall be the same as those of the House of Representatives" until the Assembly otherwise provides.

14. Note Section 29 of the Republican Constitution states that "Members of the National State Assembly shall be designated Members of Parliament".

Legislative Activity

Parliament has been utilized by successive goverrments to implement their legislative programme. Many of Parliament's legislative measures have been controversial, a great deal beneficial, some premature and others overdue. However in numerous ways, Parliament successfully contained discontent, provided opportunities for the expression of dissent and instilled a measure of confidence among the ethnic and social groups.

Legislation especially in the economic and social sectors muted attempts to undermine faith in Parliament. The nationalization of omnibus transport, the ports and insurance, the enactment of the paddy lands act, the adoption of Sinhalese — and to a limited extent Tamil—as the languages of administration, the takeover of schools, the provision of numerous welfare services, the ceilings on land and house ownership and on incomes have, in several ways, satisfied dissident sections which might otherwise have sought relief via a substitute model or by violence.

On the other hand the public security act, and legislation restricting trade union activity, disfranchising the resident Indian Tamil population and controlling the press have encumbered the exercise of democratic rights. The public security act, in particular, has been a restricting influence on Parliament in that the executive, in times of emergency, is vested with an excess of power.

However neither too much credit nor excessive blame can be attached to Parliament. Most legislative activity emanates from the cabinet. The cabinet's parliamentary majority has seldom tampered with the work of government. Only at the margin, on issues concerning severe cuts on the welfare services, has the government parliamentary group reacted adversely.

On the debit side

Parliament was not intended to be a true mirror of the nation and it remains so still notwithstanding the many political and social changes that have taken place since independence. Efforts at reform in this area have not been successful partly because the political parties (the traditional Left and the principal ethnic group, the Tamils) involved do not have enough weight to compel attention. Partly, there is a Lack of interest among the public as well—the white and blue collar workers, the trade unions and professional associations, social institutions, the press, the unversities and the intelligentsia in general.

Only recently, after 1970, has one major political party, the UNP, begun to agitate for a reform in the system of representation, even of parliamentary government. But this has been mainly due to the several defeats it has suffered at general elections since 1956. That party, when defeated, obtains a low percentage of seats in the legislature despite the very large number of votes it polls. Thus it is now forced to reject the very system of representation it had designed earlier in efforts to keep its Marxist opponents from effective political participation. However the framers of the 1972 Constitution have retained the very same provisions because these now seem to present an advantage to the SLFP. Efforts by the Trotskyist Minister of Constitutional

Affairs, Dr. Colvin R. de Silva, to correct the imbalance when the 1972 Constitution was being framed were thwarted. Another attempt in late 1974 when a fresh demarcation of electorates was being contemplated proved just as futile. On this occasion, despite the presence of the traditional Left in the UF government, the UNP and SLFP combined to agree to limit the total number of seats in the National State Assembly. An increase in seats based on the distribution of population would have meant more urban constituencies—areas where the Left is usually stronger.

This basis of representation distorts the political picture considerably. Its effect is that, following the disfranchisement of the Indian Tamil population in 1948-49, it confers an excess of representation on the rural and sparsely populated parts of Sri Lanka. The Kandyan Sinhalese districts stand to gain most from the present arrangement, although they are the least touched by modernizing or radical political influences. The minority ethnic groups—the Ceylon and Indian Tamils—whom it was intended to benefit no longer have an advantage. The low country Sinhalese as well as the urban areas remain under-represented. As a result, there is not even an attempt to approximate to the principle of one man one vote.[15]

The traditional Left despised the system from 1947 to 1952 and looked on Parliament only as a platform from which to present its views and to reach out to the public. With the rise of the Bandaranaikes and their SLFP, the Left switched its stance to one of support for these social democrats in the ultimate hope that they could utilise the latter's political organisation as a vehicle to arrive at the seats of power—an exercise in which they have, in part, succeeded.

The principal ethnic group, the Ceylon Tamils, jibbed at the system at the start, despite the slight advantages it conferred on them. Increasing disillusionment with Parliament because of their inability to make themselves felt have made them turn to extra-parliamentary forms of protest—satyagrahas, hartals, civil disobedience campaigns etc. An important section of the Ceylon Tamils organizing through the Tamil Federal Party began to demand a protected Tamil homeland in the contiguous north and east linked to the rest of Sri Lanka under a federal system of government. That organization has now changed its position and wants a separate Tamil state. Up to the general election of May 1970, the Tamil Federalists tried to exploit parliamentary divisions among Sinhalese political groupings for the advancement of their objectives. After May 1970, and sepecially after the enactment of the Republican Constitution of May 1972, they seem to have concluded that Parliament cannot or will not redress their grievances.[16]

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15. For further details see my *Electoral Politics in an Emergent State: The Ceylon General Election of May* 1970 (Cambridge, at the University Press, 1975), Chapter 3, "The Electoral Framework".

16. For example see Walter Schwarz, "Sri Lanka Ripe for Explosion" containing the text of his interview with the Tamil United Front leader, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam in *The Guardian*, 8 March 1975.

For various reasons the low country Sinhalese have not protested overmuch against the excessive representation of their Kandyan Sinhalese counterparts. The conservatives among them see in the Kandyan Sinhalese a useful bastion against socialist directions. Many of the low country Sinhalese fear that an agitation for reform could result in the Tamils (Ceylon and Indian) obtaining a more advantageous position over the Sinhalese in general. But more importantly, there is no urgency among the low country Sinhalese because they believe that leadership at the political and bureaucratic levels is still vested in their hands.[17]

The young in Sri Lanka consitutute roughly 52 per cent of the population.[18] The eighteen year olds were enfranchised in 1960 and exercised the vote at the general elections of 1965 and 1970. But they too realised their inability to make their presence felt at the centres of power. Neither the cabinet of 1965 nor that of 1970 provided for the representation of the youth element—most cabinet ministers being over forty years of age. Parliamentary candidates put up by rival political parties did not noticeably belong to the youth category.[19] Failure on the part of Parliament and governments to pay attention to their problems contributed in a measurable way to the violence unleashed by the JVP insurrection of April 1971[20]—the first tangible evidence of a rejection of Parliament by an organized political movement.

Remedial Measures

From 1947 to 1956, Parliament was largely the preserve of the English-educated and the affluent. Despite the bias towards the rural areas and the unexpected success of the traditional Marxists, LSSP, BLPI, (later BSP) and the CP at the 1947 general election, there were neither "villagers nor workers in the House of Representatives." The UNP had their country squires and the Marxists their intellectuals, professional men and the odd full-time man. This pattern was repeated at every successive general election right up to that of May 1970. It is true that there has been some, but insigni-

17. Note G. Uswatte-Aratchi in his careful and balanced study, "University Admissions in Ceylon: Their Economic and Social Background and Employment Expectations", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1974), argues that four important districts where there is a major concentration of Low Country Sinhalese (Kalutara, Galle, Colombo, Matara) have since independence (1948) "been the source of strength of the major political leaders and the permanent home of the senior bureaucracy" (p. 300). He adds that this stretch of country is "more westernized and politically more influential" (p. 301). He further states that the Ceylon Tamil district of Jaffna is also "the home of high-level bureaucrats" (p. 301).

18. They are under nineteen years of age. Forty per cent of the total population is under fourteen.

19. see my *Electoral Politics in an Emergent State, op. cit.*, Chapter 5, "The Candidates".

20. See W. Howard Wriggins and C. H. S. Jayawardene, "Youth Protest in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)" in W. Howard Wri gins and James F. Guyot (editors) *Population, Politics and the Future of South Asia*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973) pp. 318-350 and Nazli Choucri, *Population Dynamics and International Violence* (Massachusetts, D. C. Heath and Company, 1974), pp. 146-148, 172, 184.

21. see W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation* (Princeton, N. J. Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 104-149 and Calvin A. Woodward, *The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon* (Providence, Brown University Press, 1969).

ficant, dilution of the party parliamentary contingents with "the men of the people." But by and large, both the UNP and the SLFP continue to have a large component of country squires. And their urban professionals indeed wield a larger influence. The traditional Left and the Tamil parties for their part have a much higher percentage of professional men in Parliament, hardly any farmers, peasants or workers.

Nor did legislation enacted in 1959, 1964 and 1970 designed to democratize elections and to reduce the election expenditure of parliamentary candidates and political parties help in any measurable way the poor candidate, the poor parties or new political parties seeking entry for the first time into the parliamentary arena. This was indeed the declared intention. If anything, it minimized the advantages the UNP had enjoyed till that time, improved the prospects of the SLFP and its Marxist allies and reduced the reliance of the SLFP on vested interests and pressure groups which would otherwise have financed them and exacted from their governments rewards and payments in various forms.

However the SLFP and the traditional Marxists, despite the many changes were aware of the continuing exclusiveness of Parliament and the difficulties of opening its membership in any meaningful way to the lower income and social groupings. At first therefore the SLFP advocated decentralised provincial, regional or district councils as a way of bringing the administration closer to the people. During 1965-68, the UNP too became committed to this principle. But the governments of both parties could not proceed to implement any proposals for decentralisation because of its connotations of federalism. Sinhalese pressure groups and interests feared that these councils would be the first steps towards the achievement of the federal goals, often identified with separatism, of the Ceylon Tamils, particularly of the Tamil Federal Party.

In their 1968 Common Programme, the SLFP and its Marxist allies presented a scheme for popular participation in government to be effected through divisional development councils, people's committees, employees' councils and advisory committees in state offices. These were established by the United Front government of the SLFP, LSSP and CP in 1971. The Marxists hoped that these could be utilised to press the government towards further socialism. However there is little or no evidence of success either in this direction or even of increased popular interest in the business of daily government.

The institution of District Political Authorities by Prime Ministerial fiat in October 1973 has introduced a measure of decentralisation at the political level.[22] Under this, the Prime Minister appoints as District Political Authority, a cabinet minister but more often a deputy minister and at times a senior government backbencher to each of the island's twenty-two administrative districts. This Authority is responsible

22. For more details see *Administration Report of the Government Agent, Badulla District for* 69/70 (Colombo, Government Printer, 1971).

for coordinating the activities and programmes of government departments as well as disbursing funds for medium and small sized developmental work. In this way demands and representations that the public make at ministerial level in Colombo are reduced and the local Member of Parliament as well as local interests have greater opportunities of persuading the Political Authority in their respective districts of the necessity to take, defer or negate action on matters that concern them. However the institution can disorganise coordinated overall national development because it will have to bend to parochial demands. This, it is said, can be remedied to some extent by the Prime Minister's Coordinating Secretariat to which these Authorities are in theory responsible. But the sum effect is "direct (political) control over administration at district level"[23]—an unhealthy development. Nevertheless the institution is in some ways a rival to Parliament. Its protagonist, a higher rung career civil servant argues that 'the group associated with the District Political Authority for decision-making purposes at the district level is far more representative of the people and their aspirations than any counterpart group in Colombo with the exception, of course, of Parliament''.[24]

Whilst these reforms have, to a limited degree, encroached on the influence that Parliament hitherto exercised on the decision-making processes, attempts have also been made to bring the institution closer to the people. The proposal to have Parliament's proceedings broadcast was rejected on the score that this was not an administratively feasible proposition for the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation. On the other hand there has been, since 1956 and to a more complete extent since 1960, a switchover to the national languages, Sinhalese and Tamil, as the principal media of debate and discussion. Its effect has been to increase measurably the sales of copies of Hansard whenever important debates take place in the legislature.

Suggested Changes

There are at least four identifiable sources from which demand for reform arises. The fifth, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, has presumably achieved its objective by the enactment of the Republican Constitution of May 1972. Its late leader, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike had earlier criticised the cabinet system and expressed a nostalgia for the executive committee form of government that had prevailed under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931-1947. He felt that both Government and Opposition as well as their respective back-benchers shared executive work under this dispensation. It was his view that the system de-emphasised party controversy.[25]

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23. W. A. Wiswa Warnapala, "Sri Lanka in 1973: A Test for both the Rulers and the Ruled", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 156.

24. From an unpublished manuscript by B. S. Wijeweera entitled "A Colonial Administrative System in Transition: Some Reflections on Current Administrative Reforms in Sri Lanka (Ceylon).

25. Address on "Democracy in Asian Countries" to the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi on 4 December 1957 reproduced in Department of Information, *The Government and the People: A Collection of Speeches made by the Prime Minister of Ceylon, the Honourable S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike* (Colombo, Government Press, 1959) pp. 44-53 especially, pp. 51-52. The Prime Minister stated on that occasion that "unfortunately we gave that up. I was personally against giving that system up. There were certain defects, but I thought they could be remedied within the system".

On another occasion he advocated the Swiss type, perhaps because it collegial plural executive (the Federal Council) had a resemblance to the Board of Ministers under the Donoughmore Constitution. He was also in favour of combining this with the referendum on the gound that it "not only provides a broader and more stable base for the principle of democracy, but implements more fully the very spirit of democracy".[26] The Prime Minister, for various reasons, expressed strong opposition to the British form of government.[27]

It is open to question whether a revised version of the Donoughmore Constitution or an adaptation of the Swiss type could have accomplished the task of rapid economic growth that was needed at the time that this change was proposed. These systems seem more suited to stable societies with small populations enjoying an optimum of economic prosperity. Hence Bandaranaike's proposal did not find acceptance either in the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to revise the then constitution or among the framers of the Republican Constitution of May 1972.

The United National Party has voiced strong objections to some of the features of the new Constitution—in particular those relating to the political executive and the system of representation. That party appears to prefer now a presidential-cabinet type of government after the model of the French Fifth Republic. A Gaullist style President will be elected directly by the people. This is one way by which the UNP will ensure that the actual votes it polls at a general election are translated into political authority. Its other suggestion is to introduce proportional representation at the provincial level. Each of the island's nine provinces will form a multi-member constituency returning the number of representatives which it is entitled to on the present basis of assigning seats in terms of area and population. This would give the UNP seats in actual proportion to the votes it polls. The party will in all probability implement these proposals if it is successful at the next general election.

The traditional Left had earlier thought in terms of a government based on the communist model, the LSSP being enamoured more by Yugoslav practices while the CP was committed to the Soviet example. Now the trend appears to be to utilise Parliament and the instrument of participatory democracy to achieve their socialist objectives. The Trotskyist Minister of Constitutional Affairs articulated such a viewpoint a few months before the UF was elected to office when he stated that Parliament must, if the UF was to implement its socialist policies, be characterised "by leadership and not consensus."[28] The policy appears to parallel somewhat the thesis put forward by Mrs. Gandhi's late communist cabinet minister, Mohan Kumaramangalam.[29] As stated elsewhere, the Left had attempted to effect changes in the representational system but failed.

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26. see text of the memorandum submitted by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in January 1959 to the Joint Select Committee of Parliament to Revise the Constitution, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-77, in particular, p. 77.
27. *op. cit.*
28. For further details see text of the Minister's address to the UF's Sociali st study Circle in *Ceylon Daily News*, 14 December 1969.
29. see Satindra Singh, *Communists in Congress: Kumaramangalam's Thesis* (Delhi, D. K. Publishing House, 1973) especially Chapter 13, "What are the Lessons for the Future" and Chapter 14, "Postscript", pp. 80-92.

The Tamils, both Ceylon and Indian, would also want the demarcation of constituencies restructured so as to provide them adequate if not additional parliamentary representation. They have not been successful so far. On the other hand a sizeable section of Ceylon Tamils supported the Tamil Federal Party's demand for a protected Tamil homeland in the north and east of Ceylon with a regional Parliament in Jaffna. Repeated failure has now led this section of Ceylon Tamils to ask for a separate sovereign state. Some observers raise the question as to whether we are now on the verge of "nation-breaking".

There are those who are weary of the game of "parliamentary musical chairs" and demand the overthrow of Parliament and its elitist power structure. Tissa Fernando states that the insurrectionist JVP does "not represent yet another political party within the parliamentary system".[30] He argues that they constitute what F. G. Bailey has called "a rival political structure"[31] which he (Fernando) insists "rejects the old political game and all the subtle rules that go to support it." He goes on to assert that "the elite model of politics has for the first time been challenged by a counter-model". He does not however articulate what this counter-model is except to pose the view that the JVP will refuse to be "bourgeoisified" or be lured into Parliament. A reasonable assumption is that the JVP, if successful, will opt for a Maoist-style political system. This however is not likely to be very different from what the traditional Marxists will want if they themselves had the opportunity.

Conclusion

Ever since its inception observers have raised the question whether Parliament could survive, given the contracting economic situation and the obstacles to adapting it to the local environment. The traditional Left uttered cassandra-like warnings of a "revolution round the corner". There have always been fears that ballot boxes will be tampered with at general elections, that unrest will be fomented by the party in power as an excuse to cancel elections, and that governments suffering defeat in Parliament or at the polls will not give up office. From time to time political leaders have experienced the imminence of military dictatorship as well as confronted armed insurrection.

However the attention of the public is constantly being focussed on these threats to the parliamentary order by a vigilant Opposition. There is also an overly critical party press while the national press was active and vigorous in its criticism till 1973 when various kinds of legislation were enacted to control it. And it is this vigilance and criticism that provided strength to the system and helped it avoid the mishaps and disasters that it was exposed to.

Nevertheless the question arises as to whether the system can last any longer. There is continuing evidence of an excessive reliance on the military and semi-military arm of the state to suppress opposition and public opinion. Growing unemployment

30. "Elite Politics in the New States: The Case of Post-Independence Sri Lanka", *Pacific Affairs*, Fall 1973, pp. 361-383.

31. *Stratagems and Spoils: A Social Anthropology of Politics* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 15-16.

and economic hardship are exploited by political parties to stimulate unrest. The failure to achieve national unity has brought enthusiastic support to separatist parties. The island is consequently in a permanently contingent state of disequilibrium and will for some length of time have to be sustained by armed force and liberal injections of foreign aid. The dangers of collapse began to be really felt from 1956 but the expected calamity has not yet occurred.

A shift to socialist directions, such as the present United Front government endeavours to effect, could contain social discontent for awhile. But it is hamstrung by the uncertainties and limited amounts of foreign aid it receives and by the prospect of having to face elections in the near future. It is doubtful whether it could handle the economic problem satisfactorily even if it were absolved from elections. Nor is it likely that a grand national coalition which included the rival Opposition, as is seriously mooted from time to time, would improve matters substantially, though it could reduce the costs to the polity of excessive and divisive contention.

The shrinking westernized elite, increasingly impoverished by the burdens of taxation and the difficulties of finding rewarding outlets for its talents and enterprise, have either taken to migration or live in constant frustration. Alternatively many of its members opportunistically adapt themselves to the changing political order. The crisis that they face makes them incapable of attracting to their ranks the lower orders and those aspiring to upward social mobility. This elite still acts as the transmitter of western values. But the situation will not last for long.

Parliament is therefore likely to face its most serious crisis after the next parliament election. If the United National Party is returned, it will seek to improve the situation. within the democratic framework, by endeavouring to obtain economic assistance from friendly powers—a task in which it was not entirely successful in its last term of office, 1965-1970. If the present government renews its mandate, it will go all along the way to use Parliament as a rubber stamp for its policies.[32] That institution will cease to be the instrument of consensus that it has hitherto been.

32. This article was written in early 1975 before the split between the SLFP and LSSP occurred.