

THE DUTCH ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE IN SRI LANKA

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In 1609, within a decade of the establishment of the *Vereenigd. Oostindische Compagnie* (V. O. C.) and the founding of the first forts and factories in the East Indies, the directors decided to institute the office of governor general as the highest authority with overall control of the Company's eastern assets and activities. He was to exercise his power in association with a council of Indies in which decisions were taken by majority vote. In 1619 Jacatra (later renamed Batavia) was made the seat of the governor general and council and thus the capital of the Company's eastern enterprises.¹ Detailed instructions given to the first holder of this office, Pieter Both, and subsequently amplified and amended, show that the directors intended the government at Batavia to be the coordinator and controller of all aspects of the Company's activities in the East : political, commercial, financial, naval and military, social and religious. The centralization of all Dutch power in the east in the citadel of Batavia was effectively achieved with the governor generalship of Jan Pietersz Coen. As Dutch territorial possessions and commercial activities expanded in east, southeast and southern Asia, this role of coordination and supervision from Batavia assumed greater significance. Most decisions of a political nature, where delay would be injurious to Dutch interests, were taken at Batavia. The *Heeren Zeventien* or college of directors, though employers and superiors of the Batavian officials, were not in a position to issue detailed instructions on specific issues. Their control was exercised most explicitly in commercial matters and even here decisions that could not brook the delay of reference to Amsterdam were taken in Batavia. The great distance separating Batavia and Amsterdam and the fact that it took over a year for a reply to be received from the time of despatch of a letter gave the Batavian administration a large measure of autonomy in policy and execution. Further, the council of Indies was a body constituted of officials who had served for long in various, eastern *comptoirs* and thus acquired specialist knowledge of the areas that were the subject of consideration. The Batavian administration was indeed, as referred to at that time, the Supreme Government.

As the arm of Dutch political authority and commercial participation extended over the sprawling regions of maritime Asia, several subordinate seats of administration were set up under the Supreme Government at Batavia. These operated as separate governments entrusted with the task of managing the affairs of a demarcated region. These governments were organised on the same lines as at Batavia. A governor or director was in charge assisted by a council of senior officials. Just as distance from Amsterdam tended to promote independent action by Batavia, likewise the further away a subordinate government was from Batavia the more likely it was to have a wider measure of autonomous power. Thus the Ceylon, Malabar, Bengal and Coromandel administrations enjoyed a large degree of discretion, at least in political matters and to a lesser degree in matters of inter-Asian commerce. These and other similarly located places were referred to as *buiten comptoiren*, 'outer offices' looked at from the Batavian centre in the archipelago. Ceylon was the largest of these outer administrations, from the point of view of territory and people directly ruled by the Dutch.

In some respects, the Ceylon government, among subordinate governments stood in a special position in its relation with Batavia. Outside the archipelago, it was here that the Dutch had sovereign control over a large extent of land and a large Asian subject population. Its governor was usually a senior and influential officer in the Company's service. He was always an extraordinary, sometimes even an ordinary member of the Council of the Indies. Alone among the subordinate governments, the Ceylon government had the right to correspond directly with the *Heeren Zeventien* in Holland. The distance from Batavia, the special problems in administering an indigenous people different from those in Java and the fluid state of relations with the indigenous kingdom of Kandy, precluded the central government from giving detailed instructions. The officials of Ceylon at all times had a measure of initiative in policy-making and execution.

The extent to which the governor of Ceylon, supported by his council, used this initiative depended to some extent on personal factors. Strong and dynamic personalities such as Rijcklof van Goens (1658-1663, 1665-1675), Laurens Pyl (1680-1692), Baron van Imhoff (1736-1740) and Jan Schreuder (1757-1763) took major decisions on their own and asserted the autonomy of the Ceylon government. There have been cases where the Ceylon officials have carried through decisions on matters of policy in the face of Batavian opposition by appealing over their heads to the directors in Amsterdam². Generally, however, the Ceylon government operated within the framework of the general direction of policy issued from Batavia which was itself decided after consultation with the Ceylon officials. In the conduct of daily administration, however, the Ceylon officials had great freedom.

The Company's cadre of officials was variously constituted. There was the commercial cadre hierarchically divided into various grades. The assistant had the most junior rank of clerk and there were ascending grades of *boekhouder*, *onderkoopman*, *koopman* and *opperkoopman*. They corresponded broadly to the clerk, junior merchant, merchant and senior merchant in the English East India Company's structure. While these were ranks they held in a commercial hierarchy, they were now appointed to political and civil administrative functions in Ceylon as in other Dutch possessions. Then, there was a cadre of military and naval personnel with their own hierarchy of military and naval officers. While most of them served in the armed forces in different parts of the island, the commissioned officers were also appointed to political and civil administrative positions. Apart from these two categories which formed the bulk of the Dutch official personnel on the island, there were a number of others recruited for particular specialties and attending to duties related to their professions. Thus, there were doctors, surgeons, apothecaries and dressers, ordnance specialists, assayers, master carpenters, iron founders, boat builders, stone cutters, bakers, cooks and a heap of other trades necessary to service the Dutch community. To these should also be added predicants and catechists. The total strength of Dutch personnel of all categories serving in the Ceylon government generally stood at around 3000.

From 1640, to 1656 the seat of Dutch government in Ceylon was Galle because until 1656 their power was confined to the southern region of the island and Galle was the first major city to fall into their hands. With the conquest of Colombo, the capital was shifted to that city in 1658 which remained the seat of the government of Ceylon until the end of Dutch rule. The governor lived in an attractive residence, within the precincts of the Fort

and overlooking the chief executive officer with control over all matters of Dutch administration, policy and interests in the island and its environs. This included the territories held in the littoral of Ceylon and the coastal ports of the southern tip of India, which from the inception was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ceylon administration. The Indian parts extended from Cape Comorin to Nagapatnam until 1680 when Nagapatnam was transferred to the Coromandel government

The governor was assisted by a council known as the Council of Ceylon (*Raad van Ceijlon*) or, as it was more commonly referred to in the 18th century, the Political Council (*Politiek Raad*). It generally consisted of eight members, apart from the governor, sometimes less. Usually the following officers were members of council: The chief administrator (*Hoofdadministrateur*), the *dissāva* of Colombo, the first warehouse keeper (*Packhuis-meester*), the fiscal, the trade accountant (*Negotie Boekhouder*), the secretary, the pay accountant (*Soldij Boekhouder*) and the officer commanding the troops. The commanders of Galle and Jaffna were also members of the council and, if present in Colombo, were next in order of precedence to the governor. The exact constitutional relationship between the governor and the council and the extent of the latter's powers when in conflict with the former were not precisely defined. As Governor Imhoff observed, it was impossible to lay down strict rules on what subjects the governor could act on his own and what had necessarily to be referred to council. In 1651 a general instruction was issued from Batavia that no decision or action of importance was to be taken by the governor without the consent of the council³. At first, the governor had the right to appoint councillors but later this was taken over by the Batavian government. Vacancies could be filled by the governor provisionally but were subject to approval by Batavia. All decisions were to be taken by majority vote and the governor was generally bound by these decisions. If the governor wished to overrule the wishes of the majority he did so on his own responsibility and this was generally disagreeable to the Supreme Government. All letters had to be read in full council and all outgoing letters were to be signed collectively by all members of council.

It is doubtful how far these regulations were effective in strengthening the authority of the council against the powers of the governor. The governor with his vast powers of patronage and his overwhelming influence generally had his way over subordinate officers in council. Evidence of the later period suggests that council did not function as a check to the governor. Generally, councillors followed the lead given by the governor and governors saw that the support given by experienced and able councillors strengthened them in their relations with the authorities at Batavia. And, as Imhoff suggests, a governor would always be wise to take sole responsibility on himself as little as possible⁴.

In Colombo, the chief administrator was next in importance to the governor. He was the governor's deputy in matters relating to the lands in the jurisdiction of the Colombo division. He was in charge of the trade accounts and had control of the commerce of the island. He had ultimate responsibility for the precise accounting of all goods that came in and went out of the island. He had also a supervisory control over all goods in stock on the island, though the actual task of administering the warehouse was outside his responsibility. This was the work of the warehouse keeper over whom he had no control. The trade accountant and a large staff of clerks and under merchants (*onderkoopmen*) worked

under the chief administrator whose office was adjacent to that of the governor. The pay office was a separate department in itself and, because of the abuses likely to arise there, it was carefully supervised. This office kept accounts of salaries paid to the employees every month, provisions given to them from the Company's stores and the properties and effects of employees who may have died or left the Company's service. The fiscal represented the judicial side of the administration in Council. His office drew up plaints and sent cases for trial before one or the other of the Courts. After 1687, fiscals were appointed directly from Batavia in order to preserve their independence of the governments to which they were attached. The secretary recorded the decisions of the council, furnished members with copies of relevant documents and preserved all papers in his offices. He was presumably a full member of council, participated in its deliberations and exercised his vote on decisions, though there was a ruling from Batavia in 1713 that secretaries should not be members of council. His office must have been a large one employing several clerks for all letters and papers had to be copied out in a clear hand. The amount of papers that passed through his office must have been phenomenal, judging from the extant Dutch records in archives today.

For administrative purposes, the country was divided into three divisions (*commandementen*), Colombo, Jaffna and Galle. The commandants of Jaffna and Galle, in that order, stood next to the governor in rank. Though the government of the whole country was centralised in the governor and council at Colombo, the administrations of Jaffna and Galle had rather wide powers in matters pertaining to the areas under their jurisdiction. Each commandant was assisted by a council of senior officers in the province, of whom the most important was the *dissāva* who was second in authority and acted for the commandant when he was away on a tour of inspection. Generally, the council in its relation to the commandant functioned in the same way as the political council to the governor. The area of jurisdiction of the Jaffna command extended from north of Puttalam right round the north-western, northern and north-eastern coast up to south of the fort of Batticaloa. A separate commandment for the east coast lands was set up in 1671 with Batticaloa as the capital and including Trincomalee but was abolished in a few years and the area was returned to the jurisdiction of Jaffna. The Galle command extended from the Bentota river southwards along the coast up to Hambantota and, after the acquisitions of 1766, was extended to south of Batticaloa. The remaining possessions were ruled from Colombo.

In places situated at a distance from the three main seats of administration, Colombo, Jaffna and Galle, and which were considered of strategic or commercial importance, an officer with the title of *opperhoofd* was appointed in immediate charge. He was of relative seniority in service and was assisted by a small council. Kalpitiya, Mannar, Trincomalee and Batticaloa were thus governed by an *opperhoofd* and council who received their instructions from the immediate superior authority, the governor in the case of Kalpitiya and the commandant of Jaffna for the other three places. Tuticorin was also the seat of an *opperhoofd* and council with jurisdiction over the Madura coast and answerable to the governor.

In matters of internal administration, the office of *dissāva* was in many ways the keystone of the structure. It was through the office of the *Dissāva* that the rulers came into contact with the people of the land. It was an important office in the Sinhalese system of administration and was taken over by the Portuguese and, through them, by the Dutch. There were

three *dissāvas* for the island, in Colombo, Jaffna and Matara. There were lieutenant *dissāvas* under them depending on the extent of the work. The *dissāva* combined in himself military, revenue, economic and judicial functions. All the military establishments and outposts in the area were under his charge. The maintenance of law and order by the use of the Dutch and native militia was his responsibility. He had especially to see to it that the *lascarine* force was maintained up to its strength and in good discipline. He supervised the collection of land rents and was in charge of the performance of obligatory services in the villages. He was the instrument for the achievement of the policy of promoting development of agriculture and plantations. *Dissāvas* were the main agents in the effort to expand rice cultivation and to introduce new crops such as coffee and cardamoms in the 18th century. He was the head of the native officialdom and was in constant touch with them. He was president of the landraad and disposed of cases along with other officials. In his capacity as *scolarch*, he was manager of the church schools in the entire *dissavany*. These manifold duties made him a very powerful individual in the eyes of the people. He and his deputies were constantly on the move in tours of inspection to all parts of his division. The office required qualities of tact and understanding, and the ability to get on with the people of the land. A proficiency in the language of the area was a great asset. It was with reference to these qualities that appointments were made. By the middle of the 18th century it was clear that the *dissāva* was made to shoulder too much responsibility and an attempt was made to take away some of his judicial functions.⁵

Beneath the superstructure of Dutch officialdom holding all the superior and responsible posts was the native administrative hierarchy, retained intact by the Portuguese and now taken over by the Dutch. These lower level functionaries were permitted to continue provided they remained loyal to the Dutch. Their cooperation was essential for a peaceful collection of land and other revenues and for the enjoyment by the state of the obligatory services of tenants. The native official nobility was further the natural leaders of the people who would have been an invaluable buffer between the alien rulers and a subject people. From the outset it was Dutch administrative policy to wean them over and make them props of the new regime.

The traditional division of each *dissavany* into *korale*, *pattu* and village was maintained with *mudaliyar*, *korale* and *attukorale* as the chief administrative officials. In each village there was a *vidāne* on whom rested the day to day management of village affairs. It was the duty of these native officers to furnish the dues from each village and to see that the service obligatory from each individual was performed in the manner required by the Dutch. They worked under the immediate supervision of the *dissāva* and his deputies to whom they were responsible. If the villagers were to be encouraged to cultivate a particular crop, the chain of command would seep down from the *dissāva* through his deputies to the *mudaliyar* who would in turn pass appropriate instructions through the *korale*, his deputy to the *vidāne*. Similarly, if labour was necessary for a construction work, the command was passed down to the village where the *vidāne* would see the provision of the required number of labourers. The *mudaliyar* sat on the landraad along with Dutch officials and advised on customary law and land tenure.

It was found necessary to rely on the advice and knowledge of the native chiefs even in the higher rungs of administration. Thus, governors, from the inception befriended and consulted the most influential chiefs of the lowlands. The office of *maha mudaliyar* was instituted, the holder of which was constantly in attendance on the governors and advised him on Kandyan policy, land tenure problems and appointments of local officials. He was also called *mudaliyar* of the Governor's Gate. The first of these *maha mudaliyars* was Don Joao de Costa who served the Dutch faithfully for over thirty years. Generally they were Sinhalese Christians whose loyalty to the Dutch was beyond question. In the north, *mudaliyars* and *muhandirams* were appointed from wealthy Tamil Christian families.

Yet relations with the indigenous officialdom was always difficult. The Dutch were never sure of them and had to be constantly on guard. They were worried about the excessive influence and authority these officials wielded at local level. Almost every governor has advised his successor to be careful and try to curb their power. Over-powerful chiefs would oppress the people and indulge in corruption in respect of the collection of land revenue and the administration of justice. Imhoff laid down in 1740 that *dissāvas* should from time to time investigate the behaviour of native chiefs and look into the complaints of the people against them⁶. Schreuder complained in 1762 that *vidānes* made illegal exactions from the poor tenants and these were difficult to detect or root out⁷.

Then, there was the question of loyalty of the chiefs, at a time when relations with the Kandyan kingdom were not good. Van Goens saw this when he was fighting a war with Rājasinha. Acts of sabotage in the administration were frequent and many districts had to be abandoned as ungovernable. Similar situations arose in the time of Schreuder and Van Eck in the 1750s and 1760s. Yet the Dutch relied on the chiefs a great deal and could not have ruled the country without them⁸. Their knowledge of the land tenure system, of the traditional agricultural potential and of the customs of the land made them necessary-allies in the tasks of administration. Throughout the period of Dutch rule there was there fore an uneasy relationship between them and the native officials.

The administration of the cinnamon department of *mahabaddē* was a typical illustration of the policy of grafting a Dutch officialdom in supervisory control over indigenous institutions. The functions of this department were pivotal to Dutch rule in Ceylon as it organised the peeling and delivery of cinnamon for export to Europe and Batavia. The Portuguese had made only slight changes to its functioning and the Dutch successors managed it in the same way but with greater efficiency. The captain of the cinnamon department was a Dutch officer. Under the captain there were four *vidānes* in whose charge the villages of cinnamon peelers or *chalias* were distributed according to geographic location. The *vidānes* were hereditary headmen of the *chalias* and under them were *duraiya*, divided into *mahaduraiya* and *sub-duraiya*. The chief function of the department was to provide the labour force for all the operations connected with peeling the cinnamon bark and making it ready for export. The position throughout this period was that the demand for cinnamon was increasing and there was a shortage of labour to meet this demand. So the entire energies of this department were directed towards mobilising all able-bodied *chalia* men who were obliged to peel cinnamon at the required time. The officers of the department, both Dutch and Sinhalese, were busy keeping the *chalia* labour force at maximum strength by

keeping accurate lists of *chalia* population and by punishing absenteeism. These lists had to be constantly checked and revised with reference to deaths, births and those reaching adulthood. The work was very burdensome and made an excessive demand on the time of the peeler who had also to attend to his fields and work many miles away from his village out in the woods. He resorted to all kinds of devices to evade service and to secure exemption for his children. The officers of the department had to guard against this by keeping close watch on both the men and their chiefs⁹.

It was also the responsibility of the captain of the cinnamon department to administer the very rigorous *plakaats* whose purpose was to preserve cinnamon as a Dutch monopoly. The destruction of a cinnamon tree, the unauthorised peeling of its bark, private trading in and transporting cinnamon were all offences punishable with death. To enforce these, the woods had to be patrolled. There were a *chalia lascarine* force under the command of the captain for this purpose. The captain had some judicial power over the *chalias*, to the extent of settling small disputes. Major cases went through the normal legal processes. The captain was also responsible for the collection of other dues in the *chalia* villages.

Similar principles were applied in the organisation of the elephant hunt. Here Dutch control was even less because of the specialised and seasonal nature of the work. A Sinhalese *mudaliyar* was appointed *gajanāyake* or head of the elephant department and there was an *Ethandenerale* or master of the hunt, an officer with specialist knowledge of the operation and who took charge in the field when the hunt was on. The *gajanāyake* was in charge of the maintenance of the elephant stalls after the elephants were captured and tamed. Under these two officials were men who specialised in their respective spheres of work connected with capturing, taming, rearing and protecting the animals. The service of these people was obligatory for the land they held. The *dissāva* of the area where operations were held had a supervisory control over the personnel.

The native *lascarine* force was also organised in the same way under a hierarchy of native officials and the supervisory control of the Dutch. The force was constituted out of able-bodied members of families that were liable for such service in return for the land they enjoyed. The official hierarchy consisted, from the bottom of *vidāne*, *appuhāmy*, *ārachchi*, and *mudaliyar*. Each *vidāne* was responsible for summoning to service the stipulated number of *lascarines* in his charge. Careful rolls were maintained of persons liable to *lascarine* service. The *dissāva* of each district was in overall charge of the force. The force was deployed in outposts all over the country under a Dutch officer. They were taken on expeditions against the Kandyan kingdom and even outside the island in Madura, Tanjore and the Malabar coast. They supplemented the guard when cinnamon was peeled. While not engaged in active service they were used as messengers, interpreters and letter carriers. Their varied duties made them important to Dutch administration and they were given privileged treatment. Experience taught the Dutch, however, that they were of no great value as a fighting force. They could only be used effectively in defence. When it came to launching an attack, they would take to their heels at the slightest turn of fortunes. What was much more serious was that their loyalty was suspect and in engagements against the Kandyans entire detachments of *lascarines* with their officers were known to have defected to the king of Kandy.

There was a small establishment for religious and welfare administration. The Reformed Church, the established church on the island, was divided into three consistories at Colombo, Jaffna and Galle. A church assembly which met at Colombo had supervisory control and issued general instructions. The chief administrator was the head of this assembly. In such of the many churches that were spread through the country, there was a predikant in charge, assisted by a proponent or rector and native catechists. A scholar-ehal assembly, meeting in Colombo, was in charge of all matters relating to schools and registration of births and marriages. The *dissāva* presided at its meetings and it consisted of clerical as well as lay members. Once a year, some members of the assembly went on a tour of inspection of the schools. A board of deacons of the Reformed Church was established by regulation, consisting of clergymen and elders of the church. Funds were channelled into this body by the government for welfare work such as the maintenance of orphanages and poor houses. Then there was the *weeskamer*, a board consisting of four officers and two free burghers whose responsibility it was to look after the property and interests of minors and those who died intestate. At first, this was a solely Dutch institution but it was later extended to Sinhalese and Tamils as well. These were all bodies of a semi-official character with officials and non-officials participating in management.

The mode of payment of European officials differed widely from that of the native ranks. The European officials received a fixed monthly salary which varied from 9 guilders for the soldier of lowest rank to 2000 guilders for the governor. They were encouraged to receive as much of this as possible in Europe in order to lessen the need to transport much cash to the East. Besides the salary, they received a cost of living allowance and rations from the Company's stores. Rations took the form of rice, meat and wine or arrack. Besides this, officials of the lowest grade drew a small subsidy. The annual salary bill for European personnel in Ceylon amounted in the eighteenth century to around 500,000 guilders. In addition, the rations cost an average of 200,000 guilders. The total salary and allowance bill accounted for about two thirds the annual expenditure of the Dutch establishment on the island. In the eighteenth century, the strength of the European personnel in Ceylon varied from three to five thousand. All private trade in the East was strictly forbidden to them. It was the Company's position that they were fully recompensed for their services in the wages and rations they received.

The wages of the native officials was never more than 50,000 guilders per year. The reason why their salary bill was so low was that they were recompensed in the main by the traditional form of payment, namely through land. Native Ceylonese who performed administrative functions were granted the revenues of productive land in villages. These lands were called *accomodessan* and the system had been widely used by the Portuguese. Such lands were not heritable nor could they be sold by the recipient. Plots of land were attached to a particular office and reverted to the state when the holder vacated his office. But with the tendency of office to be hereditary, the enjoyment of lands attached to it had also become hereditary. The Dutch desired to put an end to the hereditary nature of appointment to offices which they wished to fill with the most efficient and most loyal men available.

This method of remuneration led to corruption and maladministration and paved the way for exploitation of tenants by powerful and unscrupulous officials. It also deprived the state of much revenue and increased the power and influence of the official nobility. Dutch policy, therefore, was to restrict to a minimum the extent of land thus given away as *accomodessans*. In Governor Becker's time (1707-1716) the withdrawal of several *accomodessans* from *mudaliyars* resulted in an increase in revenue for the state¹⁰. Van Imhoff noted in his *Memoir* (1740) the wide enjoyment of *accomodessans* by native officers as one of the causes of corruption in administration. He recommended the regulating of these grants by fixing the exact extent of land to be attached to each office. Governor Schreuder (1757-1762) drew up a specific list of such entitlements and this was approved by Batavia. According to this scheme the *maha mudaliyar* of the Governor's Gate, as the highest native officer, was entitled to 20 *ammunams* of land, a *mudaliyar* to 14 *amunams*, a *gajanāyake* to 12 *amunams*, a *korale* to 10 *amunams*, a *vidāne* to 4 *amunams* and so on¹¹. Parallel with this were also efforts to cut down the number of officials so employed. Governor Van Gollennesse (1743-1751) reduced the establishment drastically in his time¹². In spite of these efforts the native establishment continued to be top-heavy. One of the very early British reports written in 1799 on the administration of the lowlands under the Dutch observed that there were too many native chiefs holding offices and too much of the land's revenue was consumed by them¹³.

Just as there was concern with the exercise of arbitrary power by native officialdom, there was even more concern with corruption and abuse of authority by Dutch officers. The practice of associating councils with administrative heads even in remote outposts was partly intended as a check to misrule. Periodically, commissioners were sent out from Batavia or from Holland to investigate maladministration and recommend remedies. In 1684 Adrien Van Rheede was sent out as special commissioner from Holland with wide powers to root out corruption in the South Asian *comptoirs*. He spent a few years in Ceylon sorting out many administrative and policy matters and instituting action against corrupt officials. There were other attempts at reorganization that concentrated on the island. In 1659 Rijkloff van Goens was appointed commissioner to reorganise the administration soon after the expulsion of the Portuguese. Governor Becker was held responsible for a major decline of administrative standards. Proceedings were instituted against him after he left the governorship. In the first three decades of the eighteenth century, administrative misrule continued and after the worst excesses of maladministration under Governor Petrus Vuyst (1726-50) a commissioner was sent in the person of Silphanus Versluys. His actions were not satisfactory and he was replaced by another commissioner, Pielat¹⁴.

The administration of Petrus Vuyst struck a new low in abuse of authority. Even the judiciary was affected by this corruption and investigations revealed that a number of persons, including Dutch officials and free burghers, had been judicially murdered at the governor's instigation. News of these outrageous proceedings reached Batavia unofficially and in May 1729 the Supreme Government ordered his dismissal from governorship. He was summoned to Batavia where charges were instituted against him and the Court of Justice found him guilty and sentenced him to death in May 1732. The case attracted much contemporary notice and a pamphlet appeared at Rotterdam in 1735 giving an account of the entire happenings entitled : "The illegal justice executed by the Governor Petrus Vuyst in

Ceylon. And the lawful sentence and right done to the Governor by the Honourable Court of Justice of the Castle of Batavia." The whole proceedings are a vindication of the Dutch judicial system in the East but also show the weakness of administrative proceedings and the ease with which governments could become oppressive.

In the middle years of the eighteenth century a succession of able and dedicated governors retrieved the position somewhat. Van Imhoff brought about some necessary reforms in 1736-40 and restored respect for the office of governor. Likewise the succeeding administrations of Van Gollennesse (1743-1751), Jan Gideon Loten (1752-1757) and Jan Schreuder (1757-1762) provided sound leadership and effected many administrative reforms. Yet the weak area of the administrative system continued to be the relations with native chiefs and the regulation of customary land tenures. It was this that led to the biggest breakdown in Dutch administration of the lowlands in the 1760s when vast areas of the southwest and south were plunged in unrest and rebellion and large numbers of Sinhalese officials deserted to the king of Kandy. It was only the decisive defeat of the Kandyan after the expedition of 1766 that restored order in the coastal lowlands.

Corruption of Dutch officers and consequent loss of revenue was a major problem. It was not a problem peculiar to Ceylon and there is the observation of a late 18th century critic of the V.O.C. that it was destroyed by corruption. In Ceylon, there was ample scope for corruption in many avenues of economic life. In the alienation of unoccupied land and the assignment of land revenues the officers were known to have done themselves well. During the first decades after 1658, in the time of Van Goens, this practice was rife and the high officers assigned themselves the best land. It was then stipulated that no officer should be the lessee of land taxes and in Governor Pyl's time some of the land alienated to high-ranking officers was withdrawn. But the officers knew how to circumvent the former regulation by the use of frontmen among free burghers. In the eighteenth century it was widely known that many Dutch officers owned tax farms on a variety of licensed commodities such as textiles, arrack, arecanuts and other export produce.

A more serious problem, from the point of view of the directors was corruption in trade. It was an open secret that a large proportion of the trade of Ceylon was carried on in the private interests of Dutch officers. With a growing policy of restrictive controls, such illegal private trade increased. Every now and then scandals involving high officers were uncovered. These even extended to smuggling cinnamon out of the country, despite the strict regulations against this. Arecanut and textiles were more easy to smuggle in collaboration with the many private traders who came from India. The textile trade was particularly lucrative, in view of the Company's monopoly of the market in Ceylon, It was discovered by Governor Becker that in Galle the chief officers had formed a partnership which they called the 'Small Company' to carry on illegal private trade in textiles. Another common abuse was to freight goods privately on behalf of individual officers in the vessels of the Company. Innumerable regulations were issued against these practices but none of them appears to have been fully successful. A good number of officers who served in Ceylon retired from service with fortunes made largely by illicit means.

The total cost of the administrative establishment in Ceylon was uniformly high and was a constant source of worry to the directors and senior officials. Pieter Van Dam, the Company's advocate who wrote a monumental history of its activities in the East, singles out Ceylon and Malabar as being expensive establishments and as responsible for bringing the Company, already in 1693, to a state of indebtedness. In the eighteenth century, economy in administration is recommended to every governor and some retrenchment was effected. As a consequence towards the middle of the century the annual budget deficit dropped to 200,000 to 300,000 guilders from a high of about 500,000 guilders to which it had risen alarmingly. The Kandyan wars of 1762-66 worsened the position again, necessitating a larger military establishment. At the same time European rivalries in the Indian Ocean intensified, also requiring the strengthening of the neglected naval facilities in the ports of Colombo, Galle and Trincomalee and the stationing of more regiments for external defence. Several mercenary regiments such as those of Wurtemberg, Luxemburg and De Meuron were maintained at great expense. All these had the effect of contributing to the ultimate bankruptcy of the Company.

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5. *Ibid.* p. 19
6. *Ibid.* p. 25.
7. *Memior of Jan Schreuder, Governor of Ceylon delivered to his successor Lubbert Jan Baron van Eck*, translated by E. Reimers, Colombo, 1946, p. 48.
8. *Ibid.*
9. See Instructions for the Captain of the Cinnamon Peelers or Superintendent of the Cinnamon Department in *Instructions from the Governor General and Council of India to the Governor of Ceylon 1656-1665*, translated by Sophia Pieters, Colombo, 1908, pp. 43-54.

10. *Memoir of Hendrick Becker, Governor and Director of Ceylon for his successor Isaac Augustyn Rumpf*, 1716 translated by Sophia Anthonisz Colombo 1914, p. 23.
11. *Memior of Julius Van Gollenesse, Governor of Ceylon 1743-1751 for his successor Gerrit Joan Vreeland, 28 February 1751* translated and edited by S. Arasaratnam, Colombo, National Archives, 1974.
12. Administration of Justice and of Revenue on the island of Ceylon under the Dutch Government (The Cleghorn Minute) edited by R. Pieris, *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, New Series, Vol. III (2), pp. 142-144.
14. See *Memoir left by Jacob Christiaan Pielat to his successor Diederick van Domburg*, 1734. translated by Sophia Pieters, Colombo, 1905 esp. pp. 1-14.