

# COMMUNAL CONFLICT AND THE FORMATION OF THE CEYLON NATIONAL CONGRESS

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The first decade of the twentieth century saw a considerable increase in constitutional reform activities, putting fresh life into those organisations which had originated in the previous century like the Ceylon National Association and the Chilaw Association, and seeing the emergence of a number of new ones. These reform societies fell broadly into three categories; communal, provincial and "open". But the line that separated an exclusively communal organisation like the Dutch Burgher Union from a provincial organisation like the Jaffna Association was extremely thin, for the latter was mainly though not exclusively confined to the Ceylon Tamils. This was perhaps inevitable in view of the overlapping of the island's territorial divisions with communal divisions. Consequently, the provincial organisations always carried with them the danger of degenerating into full-fledged communal organisations in a moment of crisis. But in some areas like Chilaw where the English-educated section of the communities was less unevenly distributed, the provincial reform organisations had a more heterogeneous outlook. The "open" reform societies, mainly the Ceylon National Association and the Ceylon Social Reform society, consisted of a cross-section of the multi-communal westernized elite.

Reflecting the community of interest of the political elite and common ideologies which influenced them, the political programmes of these societies betrayed a marked similarity of objectives. As could be seen from the reform memoranda submitted to the Colonial Office in 1908 and 1909, while the widening of the Legislature by increased indigenous representation formed the central theme of their demands, all societies, open, communal and provincial alike, were agreed on the desirability of abandoning communal representation. However, this unanimity of political goals and methods owed much to the limited nature of their demands. Being amateurs in the political field, their demands for a share in government were so modest that they aroused

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little communal jealousy. For instance, the first comprehensive reform memorial submitted to the Colonial Office by James Peiris in 1908 envisaged a Legislative Council of 13 official and 12 unofficial members—an insignificant advance on the existing Council of 9 officials and 8 unofficials.<sup>1</sup> While the Chilaw Association urged that the number of officials should not exceed the number of unofficials,<sup>2</sup> the Jaffna Association settled for equality between the official and unofficial elements.<sup>3</sup>

There was general agreement among the memorialists that two of the unofficial members should be appointed for the Chamber of Commerce and the Low-Country Products Association, that all nine provinces should be represented by at least one member each and the most prominent provinces the Western, Southern and Northern provinces—should have an additional representative each. As this accounted for 14 unofficials it left but little elbow room for allocating them on a communal basis.

However modest these reform demands, a considerable uncertainty hung over the prospects of their realisation. No doubt the reform leaders were inspired by the Liberal victory of 1906 in Britain and Morley's famous Indian budget speech in June 1907 in which he outlined a liberal policy for India. But they had little reason to anticipate sympathy from McCallum, Governor from 1907 to 1913, who had already displayed a deep distrust of the English-educated middle class by his scheme of indirect rule through consultative assemblies of native headmen.<sup>4</sup>

The absence of any spirit of separatism in the Jaffna Association memorial was partly due to the Tamils' image of themselves as a dominant community. Perhaps this was a psychological product of the existing system of representation under which the Sinhalese were represented as two communities—the Kandyan and the Low-Country Sinhalese, while the Indian and Ceylon Tamils formed one. This arrangement not only enhanced the Tamils' numerical strength but also placed them on a par with each section of the Sinhalese in terms of the number of representatives. Hence their refusal to

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1. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike (ed.), *The Handbook of the Ceylon National Congress, 1919-1928*. Colombo 1928 (henceforth *Handbook CNC*) Memorial of James Peiris to the Earl of Crewe, the Secretary of State, 12 December 1908, p. 14.
  2. *Handbook CNC, op. cit.*, Memorial of the Chilaw Association to Crewe, 5 May 1909, p. 45.
  3. *Ibid*, memorial of the Jaffna Association to Crewe, 10 April 1909, p. 32.
  4. Sir Arthur Gordon, Governor from 1883 to 1890, introduced "durbars" of native headmen for ceremonial purposes. McCallum transformed them into consultative assemblies convened at regular intervals, the proceedings of which were reported in the *Ceylon Administrative Reports*.

regard themselves as a minority, a term connoting "helplessness".<sup>5</sup> From the same assumption sprang the refusal of the Ceylon Tamils to claim special constitutional privileges. When the Jaffna Association urged popular election for the unofficial seats excepting "two or three seats that may be reserved for the representation of minorities"<sup>6</sup> they meant the Muhammedans and the Burghers.

The reform demands being so limited and the prospect of their attainment being uncertain the reform leaders could afford to fight for principles without pondering over the intricacies of their application. The foremost of these demands was the establishment of territorial representation and, as a corollary, the abolition of communal representation. The system of communal representation afforded a poor basis for increasing Ceylonese representation and, more significant perhaps, it ran counter to the nationalist ideals of the day. Thus not only the Sinhalese and "open" societies but even the Tamils jumped on the popular bandwagon by denouncing communal representation as "a principle likely to perpetuate class feeling and not calculated to introduce the best talents into the Council".<sup>7</sup>

But this spirit of cosmopolitanism could not survive the situation created by the Secretary of State's announcement of a tentative reform scheme on 24 December 1909.<sup>8</sup> The scheme proposed to add an additional low-country Sinhalese representative and a member for the "educated Ceylonese", while raising the number of official members to 11 so as to maintain the official majority. The demand for the abolition of communal representation was rejected, but the principle of election was conceded for the European, Burgher and educated Ceylonese electorates.

The meagreness of these concessions disappointed each community alike, but the Tamils were particularly aggrieved by the proposed increase of Sinhalese representation while their own remained unchanged. The Tamils were forced to reconsider their original non-communal stand and assess the scheme according to the possible communal gains. Logically enough, the first to come under the communal yardstick was the proposed educated Cey-

5. Percival Spear, "The Position of Muslims Before and After Partition" in Philip Mason (ed.) *India and Ceylon, Unity and Diversity*, p. 31.

6. *Handbook CNC*, op. cit., Memorial of the Jaffna Association to Crewe, 10 April 1909, p. 32.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

8. The despatch transmitting this scheme to the Ceylon Government is reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 67.

lonese electorate where, much to their dismay, the majority were Sinhalese. Giving vent to this apprehension, they expressed to the Secretary of State in April 1910 their fears that the seat would "fall to the lot of the Sinhalese".<sup>9</sup>

The educated Ceylonese seat was the only positive response in the Secretary of State's scheme to the anti-communal representation clamour of the reform societies. But, for the Tamils, acceptance of it threatened to reduce their representation still further, while rejection was tantamount to abandoning the very principle they were fighting for. Consequently the Tamils found themselves in a curious dilemma. The resulting conflict between expediency and principle was very much in evidence in their subsequent memoranda. They were "disappointed and grieved" to find that representation was to continue to be communal, the Jaffna Association wrote to Crewe, the Secretary of State, but in the same breath stated that "now that Your Lordship has decided to continue racial representation under the existing nomination system, the memorialists do not ask Your Lordship to revoke that decision".<sup>10</sup> Indeed they pressed for two members for the educated Ceylonese seat, one for the Sinhalese and the other for the Tamils<sup>11</sup>—an unobtrusive appeal to introduce communal representation in the only non-communal electorate in the Secretary of State's scheme.

The Tamil *volte face* demonstrated the fragility of the non-communal image projected by the stereotyped reform memoranda and the relative ease with which the communal loyalties could override the elite interests. The Tamil-Sinhalese differences apart, the prospect of reform aroused hostile feeling between the two sections of the Burghers, the Dutch Burghers unsuccessfully objecting to the proposed inclusion of the Portuguese Burghers in the Burgher electorate.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the non-communal platform could not withstand the strain caused by the almost negligible constitutional concessions proposed by the Secretary of State sounded an ominous note for any future reform agitation aimed at wresting a much more substantial share of power from the British.

But the immediate appearance of a serious communal rift in the reform movement was prevented by a number of fortuitous circumstances. For one thing, the subsequent decision of the Secretary of State, following McCallum's recommendation, to grant an additional Tamil representative considerably

9. Colonial Office Records (henceforth C.O.) 54/733, Memorial of the Tamil Inhabitants of Ceylon to Crewe, 27 April 1910.

10. C.O. 54/733, Despatch No. 179, Memorial of the Jaffna Association to Crewe, 6 April 1910.

11. *Ibid.*

12. A memorial to this effect was forwarded to the Ceylon Government by F. C. Loos, a leader of the Dutch Burghers, and its contents were reported to the Colonial Office by McCallum on 15 June 1910, C.O. 54/734.

allayed their fears of a possible Sinhalese domination of the unofficial representation. More significant was the totally unexpected result in the election to the educated Ceylonese seat, where the rival candidates were Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a Tamil leader, and Marcus Fernando, a Sinhalese. The high educational franchise restricted the electorate to 2957,<sup>13</sup> of whom the majority were Sinhalese.<sup>14</sup> Since those who qualified for the Burgher electorate were barred from voting in the educated Ceylonese electorate the Sinhalese would have had no difficulty in electing their representative had the contest been strictly on communal lines. But on the contrary, Ramanathan was elected with an overwhelming majority.<sup>15</sup>

On the face of it, Ramanathan's victory seemed to testify to the generosity of the Sinhalese and was solid proof of Tamil-Sinhalese harmony. But interpretation differed as to how deep unity ran. No doubt Ramanathan's distinguished personality had considerable effect in swaying Sinhalese voters from the less prominent Fernando. Equally significant was the caste rivalry that lay not far beneath the surface, between the *goyigamas* and *karavas* to which Ramanathan and Fernando belonged respectively.<sup>16</sup> McCallum had no doubt that the election was fought purely on caste lines, the *goyigama* Sinhalese who loathed to see a *karava* being elevated to a place of political prominence putting their weight behind Ramanathan,<sup>17</sup> a view shared by his Colonial Secretary, Hugh Clifford.<sup>18</sup> Recent studies of the election contest have confirmed the serious caste conflict that existed behind the political facade.<sup>19</sup>

Whatever the motivating factor, communalism was evidently not the predominant issue, as was shown in the next election in 1917 when Ramanathan won again—but this time in a contest with another *goyigama* candidate. If communal sentiments had been uppermost in the minds of the Sinhalese elite, the Sinhalese candidate would not have been subjected to so ignominious a defeat.<sup>20</sup>

13. *The Ceylon Blue Book* 1912.

14. C.O. 54/810. The Jaffna Association memorial of 2 January 1918, according to which in 1918 there were 1748 Sinhalese and 1346 Tamils in the educated Ceylonese electorate.

15. Out of a total 2957 voters, 2626 votes were cast of which Ramanathan secured 1645 and Fernando 981. Ramanathan's had a majority of 664.

16. Ramanathan belonged to the corresponding Tamil caste of the *Vellala*.

17. C.O. 54/750. McCallum to Harcourt, 24 January 1912.

18. Clifford's article on Ceylon in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th edition, 1929, p. 182.

19. P. V. J. Jayasekera. 'Social and Political change in Ceylon, 1900-1919 with special reference to the disturbances of 1915', unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Univ. of London, 1970, pp. 174-179. Also of K. H. Jayasinghe, 'The Extension of the Franchise in Ceylon, With Some Considerations of their Political and Social Consequences', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1965, Univ. of London, p. 91.

20. In the second election for this seat held on 20 January 1917. Ramanathan had an even more facile victory, of the 3013 registered voters only, 1752 chose to vote, and of these 1704 voted for him, and only 48 votes were cast for his opponent Justus Sextus Jayawardene a brother of Hector Jayawardene who had been one of Ramanathan's sponsors on the previous occasion.

By demonstrating that the Sinhalese were not using their numerical strength for their exclusive benefit and the detriment of the Tamils, the outcome of the election helped to allay Tamil fears. Although Ramanathan was elected on a non-communal vote, the number of Tamils in the Legislative Council was in practice raised to three, giving them parity with the Sinhalese. While allowing it to assuage their deeper fears, the Tamils seized upon the result as confirmation of their permanent right to be represented on an equal footing with the Sinhalese despite their numerical inferiority. In their subsequent memoranda they invariably cited the advantageous position they enjoyed between 1911 and 1920 to buttress the demand for maintaining a communal ratio in representation.

Thus the election of 1911 created an atmosphere favourable for a concerted reform agitation. Although the upsurge of temperance activities after 1912 temporarily eclipsed the constitutional movement, the riots of 1915 and the subsequent Government repression of the temperance movement compelled its demoralised leaders to channel what little enthusiasm they had into the constitutional movement. With much hedging and procrastinating, the reform movement got off to a slow start. Its main objective was to establish a Congress on the lines of the Indian National Congress. The leaders of the *karava* caste had been the first to moot this idea but soon they were taken aback by the numerical strength of the *goyigamas* as demonstrated by the election of 1911. By 1915 they had become openly hostile to the idea of establishing a Congress, while the *goyigama* leaders had emerged as its foremost exponents. The tussle developed into a polemical battle, the *goyigama* dominated newspaper, *The Ceylonese*, vigorously campaigning for convening a Congress and *The Ceylon Morning Leader*, a newspaper often voicing *karava* opinion, mustering every argument against it.<sup>21</sup>

Arunachalam put an end to the "cold war" by making a passionate appeal to form a central reform organisation in an address delivered under the aegis of the Ceylon National Association on 2 April 1917. "It is not enough", he declared, "to hold spasmodic meetings, make long speeches and go to sleep... Let us have an earnest body of men to form a 'Ceylon Reform League'. ...This central office should be the brains of an organisation extending over the Island..."<sup>22</sup>

21. The caste rivalry that existed behind the campaign for a Congress is discussed in Jayasekera, *op.cit.*, and K. M. de Silva, 'The Formation and Character of the Ceylon National Congress, 1917-1919', in *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1 and 2 (January-December 1967), pp. 73-76.

22. *Handbook CNC*, *op. cit.*, Arunachalam's address on 'Our Political Needs', p. 93.

Within a few weeks the Ceylon Reform League was formed under Arunachalam's initiative. Besides Arunachalam who was appointed its President, there were only two other Tamils among the nineteen founder members of the League, i.e. C. Gnanasekaram and E. V. Ratnam<sup>23</sup>. It is clear that the main body of Tamil opinion kept aloof from the League. Evidently the League programme offered very little of interest to the minorities. For instance, its memorial submitted to Long, the Secretary of State, on 20 June 1917, as later disclosed by Arunachalam, urged the abolition of nominated members, communal representation and the official majority, without emphasising the need to provide alternative representation and safeguards for the minorities.<sup>24</sup> That the caste and religious minorities, let alone the communal minorities, viewed these demands with apprehension was demonstrated when H. L. de Mel, a *karava* leader with a strong conservative bent and one of the founder members of the League, warned the Governor, Anderson, against introducing radical reforms. "Territorial representation", he wrote, "unless qualified by an educational or proprietary franchise will result in a strong religious contest to the exclusion of important and useful minorities".<sup>25</sup>

But these fissiparous tendencies were temporarily restrained by the prospect of decisive constitutional change held out in Montagu's celebrated declaration of 20 August 1917 on self-government for India. Immediately the Ceylon National Association and the Ceylon Reform League sought permission from the Colonial Office to send a deputation to Montagu no doubt with a view to enlisting his support for an equivalent constitutional advance in Ceylon.<sup>26</sup> The outright rejection of this request by the Colonial Office brought the reform leaders back to the realities of the situation, and the two organisations were soon back on their wonted path of presenting memorials. Their first joint memorial, forwarded to the Colonial Office on 5 January 1918, was a compromise document, designed so as not to alienate any community if not giving any entire satisfaction. Justifying their demand for the abolition of communal representation, it is interesting to note, they pointed out "The existing division of the Island into Provinces lends itself to the departure

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23. The names of the members who attended the inaugural meeting of the League were given in the Ceylon Reform League memorial of 20 June 1917 to Long, the Secretary of State, C.O. 54/805.
24. The demands contained in the memorial were outlined by Arunachalam in his presidential speech delivered at the first Conference of Constitutional Reform held on 15 December 1917. *Haudbook CNC*, op. cit., pp. 108-109.
25. C.O. 54/805. Confidential memorandum, H. L. de Mel to Anderson, 2 August 1917.
26. On receiving this request Long, the Secretary of State, forewarned Montagu "in case they try to get at you", to which Montagu replied, "Of course, I have nothing to do with the administration of Ceylon". C.O. 54/808, Long to Montagu, 22 September 1917, and C.O. 54/805, Montagu to Long, 24 September 1917.

from the racial basis without abruptness".<sup>27</sup> In other words owing to the territorial concentration of communities representation would in practice remain communal for some time to come. The objection was, therefore, not to communal representation in practice but in principle. This inconsistency was the price that had to be paid for unity and to rally the various minorities who had long been used to be represented on a communal basis and whose goodwill was an indispensable condition for success. The same conciliatory spirit was evident in the National Association-League proposal to retain communal representation for the Europeans, Bughers and Muslims "as they might feel aggrieved if what they consider their vested interests were taken away abruptly".<sup>28</sup>

On 15 December 1917 an important step towards the formation of a united organisation was taken by the convening of a conference on constitutional reform. Not surprisingly, Arunachalam was elected President. 144 delegates belonging to 17 provincial and communal associations attended. Being the first of its kind, the event was, as Arunachalam claimed, "of unique interest",<sup>29</sup> but the deliberations were confined to Arunachalam's eloquent presentation of the reform case and the main points of the joint memorial already submitted. Its significance as a national conference was, however, impaired by the poor attendance of delegates from the minority associations. The Dutch Burgher Union and the Muslim Association boycotted the conference, though the less prominent Muslim Young Men's Association had sent 4 delegates. Though 17 Ceylon Tamils, mostly belonging to the "open" societies and some provincial associations outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces, were present at the conference the main body of Tamil opinion, the Jaffna Association had sent only two delegates, W. Duraiswamy and G. C. Tambiah.<sup>30</sup> Such meagre support looked all the more glaring when provincial organisations like the Chilaw Association and Galle Association had sent more than ten delegates each.

The apparent lack of interest shown by the Jaffna Tamils in the conference was symptomatic of a growing dissatisfaction among them about the National Association-League joint memorial. Their disquiet was eloquently voiced in

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27. C.O. 54/810, Joint memorial of the Ceylon National Association and the Ceylon Reform League to Long, submitted to the Governor in November and forwarded to the Colonial Office on 5 January 1918.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Handbook CNC*, proceedings of the Conference on Constitutional Reform held on 15 December 1918, p. 101.

30. *Ibid.*, the list of the delegates who attended the conference, pp. 111-115.

the general meeting of the Jaffna Association held on 2 January 1918, the proceedings of which were incorporated in a memorial subsequently presented to the Colonial Office.<sup>31</sup> Their difference related not to the general principles in the joint memorial but to the most important part of it—the electoral scheme. This, they believed, would increase Sinhalese representation so as to upset the existing communal balance in the Legislature. “Under any system of election, territorial or communal”, they pleaded, “the existing proportion of Tamil representatives to Sinhalese representatives should, as far as possible, be maintained”.<sup>32</sup> In fact they declared their definite stand for communal representation by urging the retention of the existing Sinhalese and Tamil nominated seats. Furthermore, they extended the communal yardstick beyond the Legislature to the Executive Council, for which they proposed one Councillor to be elected by the unofficials and another to be selected by the Governor from “a different race to that of the elected member”.<sup>35</sup> The underlying idea, it is clear, was to assure themselves of the presence of a Tamil unofficial in the Executive Council and thereby maintain equal representation should the unofficials elect a Sinhalese.

A comparison of the electoral scheme of the Jaffna Association with those contained in the National Association-League memorial and the Conference memorial clearly shows how strong already was Tamil concern over a possible Sinhalese domination of the unofficials.<sup>34</sup> Both the Association-League and the Conference schemes envisaged a clear Sinhalese majority among the unofficials. The former gave 4 seats to the smaller minorities (1 Muslim, 1 Burgher and 2 European) and 3 to the predominantly Tamil Northern and Eastern Provinces while allocating the rest of the unofficials (12) to the predominantly Sinhalese Provinces. The latter gave 4 seats to the smaller minorities, 4 to the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and 13 to the predominantly Sinhalese Provinces. The Jaffna Association proposed a Council with 6 Tamil (2 nominated and 4 elected from Tamil Provinces) and 10 Sinhalese members (3 nominated and 7 elected from the predominantly Sinhalese areas). Assuming that four representatives were given to the smaller minorities, the outcome of the Jaffna Association scheme would be the establishment of parity between Sinhalese and non-Sinhalese unofficials. Hence the Tamils’ insistence that the Governor, with the official votes at his disposal, should preside over the Council.<sup>35</sup>

31. C.O. 54/810, Memorial of the Jaffna Association forwarding the resolutions passed at its general meeting held on 2 January 1918.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. See the table on p. 47.

35. C.O. 54/810, Memorial of the Jaffna Association, *op. cit.*

The Jaffna Association memorial had a damaging effect not only on the prospect of securing the Conference demands but on the course of reform in general. As early as July 1917, Montagu's announcement of his intended visit to India to consider an extension of self-government had created in the Colonial Office an atmosphere favourable for reforming the Ceylon Constitution. Montagu's decision "makes it necessary for us not to lag too far behind", minuted H. R. Cowell, the "expert" on Ceylon in the Colonial Office.<sup>36</sup> G. E. A. Grindle, an Assistant Under-Secretary of State, commented "We shall have to take the (Ceylon Reform League) demand seriously ... We cannot put off the request as inopportune",<sup>37</sup> But after receiving the Jaffna Association memorial Cowell was convinced that "the divisions of the electorate are sharply at variance" and that "questions of this difficulty and complexity could only be discussed usefully after careful investigation by a Commission".<sup>38</sup> Finally, W. A. S. Hewins, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, in a statement made in the House of Commons on 1 November 1918, declared his intention to put off the reform question "until the time is more opportune".<sup>39</sup>

This decision was, however, partly influenced by the death of Governor Anderson which occurred in 24 March 1918. The reform leaders, who long laboured under the illusion that Anderson was sympathetic to their cause, naturally became concerned about his successor. A widely circulated rumour that Hugh Clifford, who as the Colonial Secretary under McCallum's regime had alienated the political elite by his intemperate criticism, was to be appointed as the new Governor brought an outburst of protests from the reform circles. The rumour was, however, without foundation for on 1 May 1918 Hewins announced the appointment of Sir William Manning.<sup>40</sup>

Manning's experience in colonial administration was limited almost exclusively to backward tropical African territories, and he was almost a complete stranger to nationalist politics.<sup>41</sup> The change from ruling the backward

36. C.O. 54/805, Cowell's minute of 4 July 1917 on the Ceylon Reform League memorial.

37. *Ibid.*, Grindle's minute of 4 July 1917.

38. C.O. 54/810, Cowell's minute of 20 April 1918 on the Jaffna Association memorial.

39. Hansard, *The House of Commons*, 1918, Vol. 108. Hewins made this statement replying to a question tabled by Philip Morrell, M.P. for Burnley, p. 1786.

40. *Ibid.*, 1918, Vol. 105, p. 1528.

41. Manning joined the Army at the age of twenty three. Except for a brief service in the Indian Army between 1888 and 1891, during which period he was engaged in the Second Burmese War, the major part of his overseas career—twenty years, between 1893 and 1913—was in Africa. He first entered the Central African Protectorate in 1893 as a Lieutenant and within four years rose to the position of Deputy Commissioner and Consul of British Central Africa. During 1901 and 1907 he served as Inspector-General of King's African Rifles. His last appointment in Africa was as Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Nyasaland Protectorate, which position he held from 1910 to 1913. Between 1913 and 1918 he was in charge of the war time administration in Jamaica. *Who was Who*, Vol. 3, 1929-1940 (London 1941).

**Ceylon National Association**

**The First Conference Scheme**

**The Jaffna Association Scheme**

Electorate	No. of seats	Electorate	No. of seats	Electorate	No. of seats
City of Colombo	1	City of Colombo	1	<b>Elected:</b>	
Western Province	2	Western Province	3	North Ceylon	4
Southern Province	2	Southern Province	2	Low-Country Districts	4
Central Province	1	Central Province	2	City of Colombo	1
Northern Province	2	Northern Province	3	Up-Country Districts	2
Eastern Province	1	Eastern Province	1	<b>Nominated:</b>	
Uva Province	1	Uva Province	1	Sinhalese	3
Sabaragamuwa Province	1	Sabaragamuwa Province	1	Tamils	2
North-Western Province (Kurunegala District)	1	North-Western Province	2		—
Negombo, Chilaw and Puttalam Districts	1	North-Central Province	1	*Unofficials	16
Local Bodies, Colombo, Kandy and Galle Municipalities and 21 Local Board Towns	2	Europeans	2	(*The number of seats for the smaller minorities was not given)	
Europeans	2	Muslims	1		
Burghers	1	Burghers	1		
Muslims	1		—		
	—	Total of unofficials	21		
Total Unofficials	19	Officials	12		
Officials	11		—		
President of the Council	1	Total	33		
	—		—		
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>				

COMMUNAL CONFLICT

protectorate of Nyasaland to heading the government of the relatively sophisticated society of Ceylon was, of course, one which required considerable mental adjustment. Such an adjustment had been satisfactorily and smoothly effected by many of Manning's predecessors. But their task had been relatively easy because, despite the minor constitutional revisions effected in 1889 and 1910, they had always had the official majority of the Legislature at their disposal, and had consequently encountered no serious difficulty in getting necessary legislation adopted. But Manning happened to come to Ceylon at a time when the burgeoning reform movement was clamouring for a structural change in the Government—from a Crown Colony system to representative government—and the Colonial Office was not completely unreceptive to their demands. Of great relevance to this situation was Manning's experience in Jamaica, where, the *Times of Ceylon* pointed out, the "people" had "seen the evils of elective representation and [had] winnowed from their experience a form of Government assuring an admirable combination of administrative control and elective representation".<sup>42</sup> Whether or not this experience would influence his attitude towards the local reform agitation remained to be seen.

During the "interregnum" between Anderson's death and Manning's arrival in Ceylon the reform leaders made elaborate arrangements for convening a second Conference on constitutional reform in December, inspired by the publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford report in India. The organisers took extra care to make the Conference "as representative as possible";<sup>43</sup> and advance notice of the Conference was sent to the various reform societies and to the leading individuals. But their real problem was to entice the Jaffna Association which had not only failed to send a substantial number of delegates to the first Conference but also rejected the Conference electoral scheme.

Relations between the Colombo reform leaders and the Jaffna Association had not been particularly cordial. In fact, in early December a fierce controversy had erupted in the Legislative Council between the Tamil and the Sinhalese members over the proposed Nachchaduwa colonization scheme. The scheme formulated by a sub-committee of the Council recommended reserving the land exclusively for Sinhalese farmers. Although the Colonial Secretary defended the decision on the grounds of the desirability of having a homogeneous settlement, the Tamil members led by Ramanathan insisted that it was discriminatory legislation against their community.<sup>44</sup>

42. Quoted in the *Ceylon (overland) Observer*, 11 September 1918.

43. *Handbook CNC*, the notice of the second Conference signed by D. R. Wijewardena Secretary of the organising committee and dated 13 September 1918, pp. 115-117.

44. *Debates of the Legislative Council*, 1918, 4 December 1918, pp. 320-326.

In the meantime, the organising committee had drafted the main resolutions to be moved at the Conference, the key one reading: "That the Legislative Council of Ceylon shall be enlarged and re-constituted as so to contain a substantial majority of members elected upon the basis of a territorial electorate with a broad franchise, with due safeguards for the minorities."<sup>45</sup> The resolution was far from attractive to the Jaffna Association who had already insisted on preserving the existing ratio of Sinhalese and Tamil representation. Viewed from a communal angle, the territorial majority envisaged in the resolution probably meant in practice a Sinhalese majority. Not surprisingly, Arunachalam Sabapathy, a prominent member of the Jaffna Association and the second Tamil member in the Legislative Council, proposed that the words "on the basis of a territorial electorate" be omitted from the resolution.<sup>46</sup>

The Conference sponsors were now placed in a serious dilemma. Sabapathy's proposal appeared as a precondition for Tamil participation in the forthcoming Conference through he was careful not to state this explicitly. Without Tamil participation the claim of the Conference to be representative of national opinion would inevitably look hollow. On the other hand, to surrender the territorial principle was too high a price to pay for Tamil cooperation. After all, it was the bedrock on which the Conference programme was built, and to drop it, the Presidents of the Ceylon National Association and Ceylon Reform League argued, would "seriously affect our case as a whole".<sup>47</sup> At this juncture Arunachalam intervened and used his influence as a leader acceptable to both communities to negotiate a settlement. A compromise was reached; the Jaffna Association tacitly consented to accept the resolution in question in return for a written pledge given by James Peiris and E. J. Samarawickrema as Presidents of the Ceylon National Association and the Ceylon Reform League respectively. Under this pledge it was agreed to "accept any scheme which the Jaffna Association may put forward, so long as it is not inconsistent with the various principles contained in the resolution" and "to actively support a provision for the reservation of a seat to the Tamils in the Western Province so long as the electorate remains territorial".<sup>48</sup>

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45. At the Conference session this resolution was moved as the Resolution 4. *Handbook CNC*, p. 128.

46. Cited in the letter sent by James Peiris and E. J. Samarawickrema to Arunachalam on 7 December 1918. Manning sent a copy of this letter to the Colonial Office on 17 July, 1922, which is listed under C.O. 54/853.

47. Cited in the letter sent by James Peiris and E. J. Samarawickrema to Arunachalam on 7 December 1918.

48. *Ibid.*

The Samarawickreme-Peiris pledge, as it later came to be known, is of crucial significance to the understanding of the subsequent ebb and flow of the communal tide. The Sinhalese-Tamil *rapport* brought about by the pledge was in no way the culmination of an intense mutual will to sink communal differences and forge a national unity. On the contrary, it was a commodity dearly bought after hectic bargaining. The terms of the pledge were not carefully thrashed out in lengthy negotiations, the Tamils placing complete reliance on Arunachalam, the architect of the settlement. "The Tamils", Arunachalam was to confess later, "as a body refused at the start to join the Congress party, and were only brought into it by my personal influence and on the assurance given by two Sinhalese leaders".<sup>49</sup> The Sinhalese leaders on their part, with the Conference close at hand—there were only six days between the offer of the pledge and the date scheduled for convening the Conference (7-13 December 1918)—had little time for protracted negotiations.

The result was a vaguely worded document full of inconsistent and un-specific promises. For instance, the inherent difficulty in reserving the promised Tamil seat in the Western province while the electorate remained territorial had been completely overlooked. This assurance was clearly self-contradictory, for the only way to reserve a Tamil seat in the predominantly Sinhalese Western province was to create a communal electorate. As Cowell observed, even if it were specifically laid down in the constitution that one of the members elected by the general electorate of the Western province should be a Tamil, a member so elected by a Sinhalese majority "would not properly represent the Tamils and might be a very unsuitable member".<sup>50</sup>

What in fact softened the Jaffna Association's intransigent opposition to the territorial principle was Arunachalam's assurance that by accepting the compromise formula embodied in the pledge they stood to increase their representation. "The assurance means", Arunachalam explained to Sabapathy, "that you have three seats for the Northern Province, and two for the Eastern Province (or more if you can get it), and that there will be one seat reserved for a Tamil member in the Western Province on the basis of the Territorial Electorate, in addition to the chances of Tamils in other Provinces and in the Colombo Municipality. No doubt also the Government will nominate a Tamil to represent the Indian Tamils".<sup>51</sup> The inference was that the Tamils would be afforded an opportunity to win a higher number of seats than they could have secured from their own separate pressure. Not surprisingly, therefore, only

49. *The Times of Ceylon*, 27 August 1921, "The Congress Split: Statement by Sir P. Arunachalam.

50. C.O. 54/853, Cowell's minute of 18 July 1922.

51. C.O. 54/853, op. cit., Arunachalam's letter of 7 December 1918 to Sabapathy.

two days before the Conference was scheduled to meet and pass a resolution demanding a territorial majority in the Council, K. Balasingham, the first Tamil member, emphasised in a Council debate the need to maintain the existing proportion of Tamil and Sinhalese representation. Referring to the composition of the House of Commons where the Irish were represented "out of all proportion to their population", and, much nearer home, India, where under the Congress-League scheme of 1916 the Muslims were given larger representation than their numbers warranted, Sabapathy called upon the Sinhalese to be equally generous to the Tamils in allocating seats.<sup>52</sup> Yet for the moment these communal undercurrents were left discreetly out of sight.

The pledge was received shame-facedly. None of the parties wished to give it publicity, nor did the Conference Committee, as K. M. de Silva points out, take up the matter at any of its six meetings held between October and December.<sup>53</sup> No doubt in the nationalist euphoria generated by the Conference and, later, the Congress, a pact laden with communal implications was a skeleton best left in the cupboard. To those in the lower rungs of the reform circles, the Tamils appeared to have voluntarily decided to participate in the Conference. No wonder when the pact became public knowledge in 1921 it took many by surprise.

But the immediate effect of this *marriage de convenance* was to soften the Tamil attitudes and smooth the path to the second Conference which was eventually held on 13 and 14 December 1918. While the main resolution of the Conference called for a "vigorous development of self-governing institutions",<sup>54</sup> the critical resolution dealing with the composition of the Legislative Council was forwarded in its original form. Arunachalam cushioned its impact, however, on the smaller minorities by assuring them the continuation of their special representation. According to D. K. Greenstreet, it was amidst strong protests from the "most important" members at the Conference that the minority representatives secured the acceptance of the principle of "due consideration for the minorities".<sup>55</sup> The objections to communal representation raised at the Conference, it must be noted, did not emanate solely from Sinhalese quarters. M. A. Arulanandan, a leading member fo the Jaffna Asso-

52. Debates of the Legislative Council, 11 December 1918, p. 389.

53. K. M. de Silva, 'The Formation and Character of The Ceylon National Congress, 1917-1919', in *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1 and 2 (January-December 1967), p. 94.

54. *Handbook CNC*, op. cit., p. 129.

55. D. K. Greenstreet, 'The Nationalist Movement in Ceylon, 1910-1931, with Special Reference to Communal and Elective Problems', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1959, University of London.

ciation, and George Wille a Burgher leader, criticised the Burgher representative in the Legislative Council for insisting that communal representation should be perpetuated.<sup>56</sup>

Though no mention of the Samarawickreme-Peiris pledge was made in the proceedings it was taken for granted that the Tamils would continue to support a united front. On this assumption the Conference resolved to convoke periodical Congress sessions, and a committee was appointed to draft the Congress constitution and its rules. The members of this committee were apparently selected with a view to giving it a thoroughly representative outlook and to forestalling a possible Tamil revolt. The latter consideration was evident in the selection of Sabapathy and Kanagasabai whose intransigence in the past had proved a formidable obstacle to unity.

Having thus established an outward unity in their camp the reform leaders awaited the Government's reaction to their demands. At the time, and indeed well into 1920, they laboured under the delusion that Manning was sympathetic to their cause. In fact Manning had rapidly swung over to the hostile view held by the European settlers on the island. In his first despatch on the second Conference—a despatch which echoed the sentiments oft-repeated in the European owned press, the *Ceylon Observer* and the *Times of Ceylon*—Manning remarked “I trust they will not get a tithe of what they ask for”. “[E]xcept for a select band of enthusiasts of a somewhat doubtful responsibility to the public at large”, he questioned whether “such reform is really a burning question”.<sup>57</sup> His trump-card, which he was to play so frequently in future, was to suggest serious divisions within the nationalist ranks. “I am interested”, Manning wrote, “to see that an opposition is springing up against the proceedings of the Reform League”.<sup>58</sup>

This opposition which gladdened Manning's heart was a letter sent to the *Ceylon Observer* by J. N. O. Attygalle, a Kandyan diehard, criticising the Conference. To Attygalle, not only were the Conference demands totally unnecessary but the existing Constitution was “an expensive and needless luxury”.<sup>59</sup> Alongside this conservatism, his letter evinced a deep distrust of the low-country Sinhalese *nouveaux riches* who, he ruefully remarked, would monopolise all provincial seats in the Legislative Council so that the Kandyans would have

56. *Handbook CNC*, op. cit., p. 136 and 184.

57. C.O. 54/814, Manning to G. V. Fiddes, Permanent Under-Secretary, 31 December 1918.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *The Ceylon Observer*, 30 December 1918, Attygalle's letter to the editor.

“not the ghost of a chance of being elected”.<sup>60</sup> The remedy he proposed was to earmark the Kandyan seats for the Kandyans<sup>61</sup>—a suggestion which had a great appeal to Manning.

In his next despatch pooh-pooing the Conference as a microscopic minority, Manning went on to analyse the communal and caste affiliations of the delegates. He made great play of the fact that the smaller minorities were thinly represented at the Conference sessions. But his most telling point was that out of the total of 111 delegates, 87 were low-country Sinhalese, 25 of whom belonged to the *karava* caste.<sup>62</sup> The implication was that the Kandyans and the high-caste *goyigama* had kept aloof. “Unless the high caste men will sink their prejudices and come forward for election”, which he doubted very much, “there would be a council composed, on the elected side, largely of men of the lower castes who would not carry with them the respect of the general community...”<sup>63</sup> Incidentally, a strikingly similar analysis appeared in the leader column of the *Ceylon Observer*—a newspaper on which Manning relied heavily for information and opinion—on 21 December 1918. The Conference, it commented, “was confined to one section of the Sinhalese and a sprinkling of a few Tamils, with one Burgher, one Mohammedan and one Kandyan”.

The bias of Manning’s analysis is evident from his glaring failure to mention, in the body of the despatch, the presence of 14 prominent Ceylon Tamil leaders at the Conference. But he had put his finger on a serious problem. From the beginning the reform movement had received lukewarm support from the Kandyan leaders most of whom hailed from traditionally dominant families. They had many reasons to reserve their support. The reform movement was effectively in the hands of the low-country Sinhalese, and, in view of the relative educational backwardness of the Kandyans, there was no prospect of redressing the balance. If the reform demands were granted it would necessarily follow that the middle classes would have a substantial share in the Government thereby weakening the old guard’s traditional hold on Kandyan society. Especially, if territorial electorates were set up the Kandyan leaders feared that the relatively educated and well-to-do low-country settlers in the Kandyan Provinces would swamp their electorates. As the reform activities gathered momentum about the time of the first Conference the Kandyan leaders’ apprehensions became more and more pronounced. At the first sessions of the Legislative Council convened after Manning’s arrival in the Island, J. H.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

62. C.O. 54/818, Manning to Milner, the Secretary of State, 7 February 1919.

63. —do—.

Meedeniya, the Kandyan member, sounded a strong note of disapproval of the first Conference electoral scheme adopted by the Conference. Toeing the communal line already taken by the Tamil member, Balasingham, he declared "In any scheme of reforms that may be put forward the Kandyan Provinces must be represented by Kandyans themselves".<sup>64</sup>

Manning saw in this dissentient voice both a chance to belittle the Conference activities and a means of pushing his own reform scheme. But as far as the former was concerned Manning was predictably on a wild goose chase. For, since the Kandyans did not constitute an important element in the reform movement their dissent was unlikely to amount to a crippling blow to the movement's progress. The real weakness of the movement lay in fact elsewhere—in the shaky basis of Tamil support. Manning was doubtless unaware of this vulnerable point. He had no natural sympathy with the Tamils. For unlike the Kandyans, they lacked the element of conservatism in their attitude which appealed so strongly to him. Or, perhaps he thought an alliance with Kandyans was fraught with fewer risks. He prided himself on his circumspection; "I am a cautious person and I shall do nothing which I shall regret at leisure".<sup>65</sup>

At a gathering of Kandyans held soon after the second Conference, Manning took the opportunity, when presented with a number of petitions and memorials, of openly encouraging the Kandyans to adopt a more direct and personal form of communicating with him.<sup>66</sup> In January 1919, at a dinner given to him by a number of Kandyan chiefs, Manning assured the Kandyan community that "in any question in connection with the reforms which are in the air at the present moment, their wants and their aspirations will not be forgotten".<sup>67</sup> The pronouncement encouraged not only the Kandyans but also the smaller minorities to come forward with their separate demands. On 24 January 1919 the "threatened minorities" staged a public meeting in Colombo to urge the necessity of constitutional safeguards.<sup>68</sup>

The Kandyan leaders on their part lost no time in preparing a reform scheme behind closed doors. Deprecating the secrecy which surrounded their activities, the *Ceylon Daily News* editorially commented "... the counter-reformers.... flit like shadows with memorials hidden in secret sleeves".<sup>69</sup> In late March, Panabokke, the President of the Kandyan Association, announced

64. *Debates of the Ceylon Legislative Council*, 1918, 11 December 1918, p. 389.

65. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 6 January 1919, Manning's speech at the Kandyan Chiefs' dinner.

66. *Ibid.*, disclosed by T. B. L. Moonemale at the Kandyan Chiefs' dinner.

67. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 6 January 1919, Manning's speech.

68. *Ibid.*, 25 January 1919.

69. *Ibid.*, 24 January 1919, Editorial.

that they had drawn up a memorial for securing the return of Kandyan representatives for the Kandyan Provinces. But he refused to publish or reveal its contents because the Association "count[ed] among its members many Government officers".<sup>70</sup>

That the Kandyans were straying from the central reform movement was clear to contemporary political observers. The *Ceylon Daily News* repeatedly emphasized the need to effect a compromise with the Kandyans. As a formula for a compromise it suggested that one seat in each of the Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces should be earmarked for the Kandyan representatives.<sup>71</sup> This suggestion was, however, obviously inconsistent with the territorial principle of the Conference leaders, and especially after a similar demand presented by the Jaffna Association had been rejected, they naturally felt indisposed to entertain it. However, no steps were taken to arrest the widening rift.

In the first six months after submitting the Conference memorial the reform leaders were kept totally in the dark as to the government's reaction. Apparently they determined on keeping the political temperature low since a renewal of agitation might provoke a hostile reaction from King's House and Whitehall. Not until mid-May did the *Ceylon Daily News* give vent to the growing impatience in the reform ranks over the delay in the government's response, but the comment itself was liberally sugar-coated so as not to give the impression of a threat.<sup>72</sup> Sedulously nurturing a moderate image it leant over backwards to secure Manning's good graces. "His Excellency we feel sure", commented the *Ceylon Daily News*, "is far better equipped to deal with the demands of an intelligent people than was Sir Henry McCallum".<sup>73</sup> It was early July before the public learned that Manning had submitted his reform proposals to the Secretary of State.<sup>74</sup>

By then Manning had submitted two reform schemes. The first, submitted within a few days of the Second Conference, proposed, in place of the existing official and unofficial division, a Legislative Council with a "Government side" and an "Elected side". Within this new division the membership of the Legislative Council was to be raised to 31, without relinquishing the government's overall control. While the existing Council had an official majority of one, the government side in the proposed Council was to have a majority of one over

70. *Ibid.*, 25 March 1919, proceedings of the Kandyan Association Annual General Meeting.

71. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 13 January 1919 and 15 February 1919, Editorials.

72. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 15 May 1919, a letter to the editor on constitutional reform.

73. *Ibid.*, 8 July 1919, Editorial.

74. *Ibid.*, the editorial commented "The information that His Excellency the Governor's proposals have at last been reached at the Colonial Office, comes as an agreeable surprise to the people".

the elected side. To fortify still further the Government's position vis-a-vis the elected representatives, Manning recommended that the elected side should be, certainly at first, and preferably always, without the financial control".<sup>75</sup>

Submitting his second reform scheme in May 1919, Manning drew the Colonial Office's attention to the Kandyan leaders' "secret" memorial, claiming at least six seats for themselves, and to a plea of certain high-caste low-country Sinhalese landed proprietors who asked him "for safeguards against their representation in the Council by any particular organisation ... or by irresponsible and inexperienced politicians".<sup>76</sup> All this buttressed his assertion that the reform agitation was confined to a section of the low-country Sinhalese low castes.

Structurally Manning's second reform scheme did not differ from the first, but it proposed to raise the number of members on the government side to 20 and on the elected side to 19, thus still preserving the government majority. Clearly the second scheme suited Manning's purpose better than the first. For, under the first scheme, the Ceylonese members if all united in solid phalanx, could form a majority, commanding 16 votes as against the government bloc's 15 (6 ex-officio, 5 official and 4 European members). But no such eventuality was possible under the second scheme as it envisaged a proportionately larger increase of the government bloc, from 15 to 20 (6 ex-officio, 9 official and 5 European members), while the rest of the Council was to be increased by only 3. This new arrangement, Manning wrote to Milner "would always ensure the Government of a majority of one, even if all the Ceylonese members on the Government side defected to the Elected side."

#### Manning's First Reform Scheme, 31 December 1918

The Legislative Council: 31 members

##### *Government Side:*

Ex-officio .. 6  
Officials .. 5

##### *Nominated Unofficials:*

European Planters .. 1  
European Commercial .. 1  
Sinhalese or Tamil .. 1  
Burghers .. 1  
Indians .. 1

16

##### *Elected Side:*

For the 9 Provinces .. 9  
City of Colombo .. 1  
Kandyans .. 1  
Mohammedans .. 1  
Burghers .. 1  
Europeans .. 2

15

The Executive Council: 8 members

Officials 5, nominated European unofficials 2,  
nominated Burgher, Sinhalese or Tamil 1 — 8.

(\*Manning forwarded this scheme to G. V. Fiddes, Permanent Under-Secretary, in his despatch of 31 December 1918, C.O. 54/814).

75. C.O. 54/814, Manning to Fiddes, 31 December 1918.

76. C.O. 54/819, Manning to Milner, 18 May 1919.

77. *Ibid.*

**Manning's Second Reform Scheme, 18 May 1919****The Legislative Council : 39 members**

<i>Government side</i>		<i>Elected Side</i>	
Ex-officio	.. 6	For the 9 Provinces	.. 9
Officials	.. 9	Colombo Municipal area	.. 1
<i>Nominated Unofficials</i>		Kandyans (nominated or elected)	.. 2
Europeans	.. 2	Burghers	.. 1
Sinhalese or Tamil	.. 1	Europeans	.. 3
Burghers	.. 1	Low-country Products Association	.. 1
Tamil or Kandyan	.. 1		
	20	<i>Nominated</i>	
		Indians	.. 1
		Mohammedans	.. 1
			19

(\*This scheme is contained in Manning's despatch of 18 May 1919 to Milner, C.O. 54/819.)

Manning's reform schemes were typical of the constitutional experiments feasible within the Crown Colony system without actually surrendering government control over the Colonial legislatures. Under the new Government Side-Elected Side division proposed by him, even with the concession of a substantial unofficial majority, including a large elected element, it was possible, by creating elected seats to represent special interests, to 'divide and rule'. The European seats on the Government side as well as on the Elected side, together with the ex-officio and official seats, assured the Government of a majority in any event.

Manning's obsession with the Crown Colony legislatures was bound to have repercussions on the superficial communal unity that prevailed in the reform movement. For, failure to secure the Colonial Office sanction for his pet scheme left him with the alternative of winning one section of the community over to the Government side.

The Colonial Office, however, favoured giving the local representative greater control over the Legislative Council. Especially after the British Cabinet had publicly committed itself to eventual self-government in India, the Colonial Office found it difficult to withhold similar concessions from Ceylon. Besides, they were keen not to leave too much room for criticism at home, especially in the House of Commons where the Secretaries and the Under-Secretaries

of State for the Colonies were constantly pilloried by members like Joseph King, Sir W. Collins, Philip Morrell and Josiah C. Wedgwood.<sup>78</sup>

In May 1919, a reform scheme which seemed more acceptable to the Colonial Office than Manning's proposals, was forwarded to it by R. E. Stubbs who, having served as Colonial Secretary from 1913, left Ceylon in early 1916 and later became Governor of Hong Kong. Proceeding from the premise that the Colonial Office intended to give the Ceylonese "a genuine chance of progress on self-governing lines", he contended that the "Governor's scheme is impossible",<sup>79</sup> To him, an unofficial on the "Government Side" voting with the Government as presupposed in Manning's scheme was as inconceivable as the dichotomy between the "Government Side" and the "Elected Side". Instead, he proposed to concede an elected majority in the Legislative Council and invest the Governor with the necessary powers to veto "absolutely insane legislation and to push through absolutely necessary legislation".<sup>80</sup>

The reform leaders in Ceylon had no inkling of these negotiations. The Colonial Office and the Ceylon Government repeatedly refused to publish Manning's reform proposals. This engendered among the reform leaders a fear that they would be left unconsulted in the forthcoming constitutional revision. "There is a danger", warned E. W. Perera, a leading member of the reform movement, in a public speech, "that the Colonial Office will foist on us a scheme hatched in secret by the local bureaucracy, which we shall have no opportunity of examining, and plead settled fact when the question is raised".<sup>81</sup> To prevent this, the Conference leaders sent a deputation headed by H. J. C. Pereira to England and urged Milner to suspend final decision on reforms until the deputation had been given an opportunity to meet him.

Milner granted them an interview on 15 October 1919. Judging by the points dwelt on at length, what Milner had in mind was not so much to discuss with them the broad principles of reform as to test their reaction to changes contemplated in the franchise and in the provision for communal representation. But the only Tamil member in the delegation was Dr. V. Gabriel who was

78. Joseph King, M.P. for Somerset North, criticised the rumoured appointment of Sir Hugh Clifford as Governor of Ceylon. Hansard, *The House of Commons*, 1918, Vol. 105, p. 1528. Sir W. Collins, M.P. for Derby, pressed for an investigation into the shooting of civilians during the riots of 1915, *ibid.*, p. 2344. Philip Morrell, M.P. for Burnley, and Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, M.P. for Newcastle-under-Lyme, pressed for reforms in the Ceylon Constitution, *ibid.*, Vol. 108, p. 1786 and Vol. 114, p. 1178 respectively.

79. C.O. 54/819, Stubbs's memorandum of 17 May 1919.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 16 June 1919, E. W. Perera's public lecture on "Ceylon's Opportunity".

neither a widely accepted Tamil leader nor very articulate. Therefore, whenever a matter pertaining to the Tamil community was raised by Milner it was Pereira, a self proclaimed Burgher, who had to answer—an arrangement no doubt which failed to impress Milner.

Nevertheless, Pereira presented his case, as Cowell admitted “with ability and moderation”.<sup>82</sup> While strongly denouncing communal representation in principle he suggested that there should be a provision that in the areas where the Burghers, Muslims and Europeans were concentrated, one or two of the elected members should belong to these communities. But he could offer no similar formula to guarantee the Tamils a fair share of the representation when, as he urged, communal representation was abandoned. It was on this point that Milner taxed him most. Questioned by Milner as to how, if members were elected exclusively on territorial basis, he would prevent the Sinhalese capturing about 95 percent of the seats, Pereira could only say “that could never happen”.<sup>83</sup> Milner was probably no less uncertain on this point after the interview than he was before. One cannot help thinking in these circumstances that the presence of an effective Tamil spokesman would have had considerable effect on the final reform scheme.

Meanwhile, in Ceylon, the reform leaders went ahead with their plan to convene a “National Congress”. That support for this event was forthcoming from the various communities was taken for granted. The Jaffna Association refused, however, to waive their insistence on maintaining a communal ratio in the system of representation,<sup>84</sup> but attached no new conditions to their support for a Congress. Neither did they seek to get the Samarawickrema—Peiris pledge ratified by the committee appointed to draft the rules and the constitution of the Congress. Nor did the Sinhalese leaders question its validity in the new context. The Jaffna Association representatives serving on the Congress committee showed no less enthusiasm for convening the Congress than the Sinhalese members. It is, however, surprising that the reform leaders did not make overtures to the Kandyans. A section of the Kandyans headed by A. F. Mola-mure remained loyal to the Conference, but the Kandyan Association to which the bulk of the Kandyans belonged was openly taking a separatist line and advancing demands which were clearly inconsistent with those of the Conference.

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82. C.O. 54/826, Cowell's minute of 24 October 1919 on the proceedings of the interview.

83. C.O. 54/826, proceedings of the interview.

84. After the second Conference C. Arulambalam, a leading member of the Jaffna Association wrote to the *Ceylon Daily News* expressing his community's desire to “maintain under any system of representation the present proportion of representation in the Council”. The *Ceylon Daily News*, 10 January 1919.

The main resolutions to be moved at the Congress session were published in September. Modelled on the Constitution which Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Bombay, proposed for the Bombay Presidency, the electoral scheme demanded a Legislative Council of 50 members of whom four-fifths were elected on the basis of territorial electorates, leaving only 10 out of 50 seats for the officials and the unofficials nominated from the smaller minorities.<sup>85</sup> The number of elected members was to be determined on the basis of one representative for every 100,000 inhabitants.

The *Ceylon Daily News* feared that the change from mixed territorial and communal representation to pure territorial representation envisaged in the proposals was too abrupt to be acceptable to the minorities. "Reformers should not", it commented editorially, "emulate the ostrich and shut out of their mental horizon matters that make them uncomfortable. There is a greater need now than ever for facing the truth boldly. The truth then is that all the communities in the country will begin to co-operate of their own accord only when they are assured in themselves that their own interests will be safeguarded".<sup>86</sup> It could not, however, be contended that the scheme was foisted on the minorities because the committee which formulated it was representative of the minorities except for the fact that it did not include a leading Kandyan.<sup>87</sup> Apparently the authors of the scheme were actuated by their conviction that they should endeavour to keep the number of communal electorates to a bare minimum even at the risk of arousing concern among certain minorities.

Apart from the electoral scheme the Congress committee demanded an elected Speaker, limitation on the Governor's powers and a Governor with Parliamentary experience, the last demand being clearly directed against Manning. Manning's initial popularity among the reform ranks began to wane with the delay in his response to their demands. It took a sharp turn downward when a rumour reached Ceylon around September 1919 that Manning's reform proposals were of reactionary character and that the Secretary of State had asked him to reconsider them.<sup>88</sup> The Governor's stock went lower still when he reinstated Bayly and Sly, two of the four Europeans who had been deprived of their offices of Justices of Peace and unofficial

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85. *Handbook CNC*, op. cit., "Case for Constitutional Reform" by the Joint Committee of the Ceylon National Association and the Ceylon Reform League, pp. 170-171.

86. The *Ceylon Daily News*, 2 December 1919, editorial.

87. Among the members to the joint committee appointed to draft the Congress regulations there were 9 minority representatives, including Arunachalam, M. A. Arulanandan, Abdul Cader, E. V. Ratnam and G. A. Wille, *Handbook CNC*, p. 162.

88. The *Ceylon Daily News*, 8 September 1919, editorial, "The Governor's Report", and 6 September 1919, editorial, "The Theory of Misrepresentation".

Police Magistracies by Governor Anderson for illegally shooting civilians during the riots of 1915.<sup>89</sup>

A rift with the Government having thus already been created, and without a European go-between the reform leaders convened the first session of the Ceylon National Congress on 11 December 1919. Its principal architect, Arunachalam, was elected the first President. Recalling his uphill task, he wrote in 1923 "Only those who have been in the inner councils of the reform movement can know how difficult it was to bring the various communities together on a common platform, what toil and tact were needed to educate the people in their rights and duties to remove ancient prejudices and jealousies, to harmonise differences and dissensions and create the indispensable basis of mutual trust and co-operation".<sup>90</sup>

A fair number of minority representatives, excepting those of the Europeans and the Burghers, were present at the session. The European's hostile attitude to reform activities was quite understandable, for they held it as axiomatic that "whatever enhancement in the power of the public may be effected, it will involve a diminution rather than an increase" of their own power, as the European Association confessed in a rare burst of candour.<sup>91</sup> The Burghers, whose entrenched position in the Government services had already been threatened by the increasing Tamil and Sinhalese competition, were naturally nervous about the growing reform movement that aimed at securing greater political power for the Ceylonese. Not surprisingly, therefore, although G. A. Wille, a prominent Burgher leader, attended the Congress session the Burgher Electoral Association, their main political wing, stayed away from it.

In his Presidential speech, Arunachalam declared, "By the inauguration of this Congress we proclaim that we have done once and for all with our petty differences and dissensions".<sup>92</sup> But, in the course of the proceedings, disagreement arose over the resolution dealing with the composition of the Legislative Council which insisted that the minority representatives should be nominated and not elected from special electorates. Except perhaps the Europeans,<sup>93</sup> the smaller minorities were not receptive to this stipulation as it would deprive them of the right to elect their representatives. This dissent was aired

89. Manning announced their reinstatement on 4 December 1919, *ibid.*, 16 December 1919.

90. Arunachalam's letter to Manning, quoted in W. Talgodapitiya, *Portraits of Ten Patriots of Sri Lanka*, p. 66.

91. *The Ceylon Daily News*, 6 March 1919, report of the European Association.

92. *Handbook CNC*, op. cit., p. 194.

93. In 1910, when it was proposed to introduce the elective principle the Europeans preferred nomination, C.O. 54/732. McCallum to Sir Francis Hopwood, 19 January 1902, forwarding Clifford's views on European representation.

when T. B. Jayah, a Muslim leader, moved that the special electorates of the minorities should be continued alongside the general electorates. The proposal was, in Jayah's words, "strenuously opposed" by his Congress colleagues and received the support of only two Sinhalese delegates, C. E. Corea and F. A. Obeyesekera.<sup>94</sup> But at the end, possibly fearing a defection by the smaller minority representatives, the insistence on nomination was withdrawn and the original resolution was amended to read that one-fifth of the Legislative Council members "should consist of officials and unofficial members to represent important minorities".<sup>95</sup>

All this serves to illustrate the point that during the formative period of Congress-type organisations in the various colonial territories the submergence of internal differences was the order of the day. It was in the next stage of the political development, when the local communities began to enjoy a larger share of political power, that the real strength and weaknesses of such umbrella organisations came to be tested.

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94. *Debates of the Ceylon Legislative Council*, 1928, Vol. 3, Jayah's speech recalling the proceedings of the first Congress session, p. 1956.

95. *Handbook CNC*, op. cit. p. 208.