

PARLIAMENTARY SUPERVISION OF ADMINISTRATION IN CEYLON, 1947 TO 1956: PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

W. A. WISWA-WARNAPALA

Sir Ivor Jennings, reviewing the operation of the Soulbury Constitution in its first year, identified a number of defects which he thought would interfere with the proper functioning of Cabinet government in Ceylon. Some of them related primarily to the question of parliamentary supervision of administration.¹ His complaint was that members of Parliament continued to exhibit a great interest in the details of administration, and this development, he contended, had been reinforced by the failure of the parliamentary machine to provide adequate opportunities for debate on general policy. He argued that this interest of the ordinary members in details of administration, was a continuation of the practice which developed during the Donoughmore dispensation under which the members of the State Council intervened in matters of administration.² This, though quoted often to justify interference in matters of administration by members of Parliament, does not provide an adequate explanation. The availability of opportunities for parliamentary supervision of administration needs to be investigated to see whether it was the ineffectiveness of parliamentary instruments of control which encouraged this development. While taking into consideration the relative significance of electoral and political factors, the main aim of this essay is to examine the efficacy of those instruments of control which are at the immediate disposal of the members of Parliament.³

Parliament carries the prime responsibility for the control of both taxation and expenditure, and therefore, the concept of the member as taxpayers' defender is not obsolete. It is this concept that strengthens the need to exercise

1. Jennings, Ivor. *Constitution of Ceylon*. (Oxford, 1951), pp. 125-135.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

3. This paper does not seek to discuss the Auditor-General, the Public Accounts Committee and the Select Committees. The petitions and the role of the Petition Committee too have not been discussed. The petitions, when tabled, are referred to the respective Committee, which after sometime refers them back to the bureaucracy for action. Their impact, however, is very negligible. The more important institutions of parliamentary control of administration, which do not enter into the discussion in this paper, will be examined in another paper.

that critical function more effectively in an epoch when the size and complexity of Government activities have increased considerably. The view has been expressed, in relation to the House of Commons, that 'the adaptation or extension of existing devices could meet the requirements'.⁴ The devices that obtained in the House of Representatives of Ceylon, though patterned on the procedure that prevails at Westminster, represented a compromise between the procedure of the House of Commons and the previous legislative experience of the island. A number of procedural difficulties have arisen because of this amalgamation of procedures, and despite this, such instruments as the Budget Debate, Supplementary Estimates, Questions, Adjournment Hour and Private Member Resolutions have proved effective in exercising a certain degree of control over administration.

Budget Debate

The debates, which provide the House with one of its more effective occasions for criticism, take a variety of forms; the annual budget, supplementary estimates, periodical censure motions and bills. In Ceylon, the Appropriation Bill is presented at the first reading, and the second reading is the occasion on which the Minister of Finance presents the budget. There is no debate immediately after the Budget Speech, and the House adjourns by prior arrangement for 10 to 14 days in order to enable the members to study the budgetary proposals. The Second Reading is allotted 7 days, and the allocation of time for speeches is done in consultation with the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. The Standing Orders were amended in 1969, and now 9 days are allotted for the Second Reading. Attempts have been made to organise the debate and control speeches but experience has shown that these have had little or no effect. Indeed it could be said that the discussion at the debate on the Appropriation Bill has deteriorated, and there is a variety of reasons for this.

In Ceylon, unlike in England, the second reading of the budget attracts a large number of speakers, and the discussion is not necessarily dominated by the Opposition. In the 1954-55 and 1955-56 budget debates, 55 and 69 speeches were made respectively. The general convention is that this debate shall be confined to matters of policy and important issues. It provides members with an opportunity to review the policy of the Government and examine the financial implications of the budgetary proposals. The main policy issues are discussed, but the emphasis is on the adequacy or inadequacy of the expenditure in terms of the constituency needs.⁵ But members, instead of speaking on general policy issues, take up issues which normally should be dealt under Votes.

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4. Hanson, A. H. and Crick, Bernard. *House of Commons in Transition* (Fontana Books, 1970), p. 46.
 5. Perera, N. M. 'Financial Procedure in the House of Representatives', in *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1956, p. 25.

despite reminders from successive Speakers, in an effort to direct the debate, that speeches based on specific needs and parochial grievances could well be made at the Committee Stage.⁶ Thus there is in practice little difference between the speeches made at the Second Reading debate and at the Committee Stage. The utilisation of this occasion for the ventilation of parochial grievances has minimised its effect as an instrument of control over the administration.

Committee Stage

As in the Second Reading, the Committee Stage has certain characteristics that are peculiar to Ceylon. The Bill is committed to the whole House and Standing Order 74 (5) provides that 'not more than sixteen of the days allotted shall be allotted to the Committee Stage of the Appropriation Bill, and on the last of such days at 8 p.m. the Chairman shall, unless the bill has previously been reported, put forthwith the Question on any amendment then under discussion and then successively on any Government amendments to that Head and the Question necessary to dispose of that Head, and then proceed successively to put forthwith the Question with respect to each Ministry's Heads, that the total amounts of the Heads outstanding in the Ministry's estimates be inserted in the Schedule for the services defined in those estimates and then that the several Schedules respectively stand part of the Bill, and the House shall not be adjourned until the Bill has been reported'.⁷ This was the procedure adopted in the Committee Stage discussion, and the 1969 amendment to the Standing Orders increased the number of allotted days from twelve to sixteen days. Though this has been done to accommodate the enlarged membership of the House of Representatives, the nature of the Committee Stage discussion remains unaltered.⁸ The procedure that came into operation in 1947 is that the debates on sub-heads will be in respect of Amendments to Votes, and the relevant Standing Order required that notice should be given for amendments. Mr. Speaker, Sir Francis Molamure, for example, adhered to the requirements of this Standing Order. This kind of procedure was fairly cumbersome, and it interfered with the enthusiasm of the ordinary member of Parliament.

In Ceylon, the Committee Stage is not entirely an occasion for the members of the Opposition; in fact, there is equally active participation of the members of the Government Party. They are not concerned with the elimination of wasteful expenditure but only with getting certain of their constituency grievances redressed. This, in fact, has become a procedural problem, and it creates special difficulties for the Chairman. At these debates, there is no party control, and the members speak for themselves. The Chairman in order to avoid such situations, often reminds the House of the need to draw up a programme for the Committee Stage, and that this could be done by convening a joint meeting

6. *Hansard* (H[ouse] of R[epresentatives]) Vol. 18, column 595.

7. Vide Standing Orders of the House of Representatives.

8. The House of Representatives was enlarged in 1960 and the membership increased from 101 to 151 members, and this required a revision in the Standing Orders.

of the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the House and the Chief Government Whip'.⁹ In 1952, the Leader of the Opposition began consulting the leaders of the parties within the Opposition, and this practice was continued in the subsequent years. Though this did result in a certain degree of discipline into the ranks of the Opposition, was nevertheless a total success.

A number of difficulties have arisen at the Committee Stage of the discussion. Often members did not take directives from the Opposition. Others have spoken four or five times under the same Head of Vote. The speeches were generally of a repetitive character, and successive Chairmen have had to remind members of the need to avoid 'tedious repetition'.¹⁰ There is also the practice of interruptions by members, accompanied by heated arguments. This, which should normally happen at the Second Reading where principles of policy are discussed, happens often at the Committee Stage, and the Chairman has, on certain occasions, been compelled to issue warnings running to nearly 50 lines in one column of the Hansard. In fact, Mr. H. S. Ismail, as Chairman of Committees, complained that the standard of the proceedings had deteriorated, and this was particularly so in the Second Parliament.

The other defects relate to the order in which the Ministries are taken up for discussion. The estimates in Ceylon are in an order, according to which the Votes of the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance could be taken up at the initial stage of the discussion. As a result of this, three or four Ministries receive the maximum amount of discussion within the 16 days allotted for the Committee Stage. Despite repeated warnings from the Chair to the effect that 'members cannot take too much time over one Minister', the estimates of the Prime Minister once took up as much as 4½ hours.¹¹ The explanation is that certain departments, for instance the department of Police which came under the purview of the Prime Minister, invited criticisms from practically every member. This type of conduct results in two things. Time needs to be saved for the discussion, and the Chairman is compelled to impose a ceiling for the discussion of certain Ministries. In 1955-56, he allowed two hours for the discussion on the Ministry of Home Affairs. The next is the scant attention which certain Ministries receive at this stage of the discussion. On the last day of the discussion, quite often, the votes of as many as five or six Ministries are taken up, and consequently no proper examination of their estimates take place. When the time is limited, members take a Ministry's votes together apart from Heads, and examine them, and thereby the effect of parliamentary supervision is minimised. The most glaring defect is that certain departments do not get any attention at all, and, in fact, no word is spoken on them. In 1955-56, nearly 24 departments were not discussed at all. The minor departments such as Wild Life, Social Services, Town and Country Planning, National

9. *Hansard*. (H of R.) Vol. 22, 1955-56, column 1348

10. *Ibid.*, column 1348.

11. *Ibid.*, column 547.

Housing, Postal and Telecommunications Services, Meteorology, Broadcasting, Aviation, Ports other than Colombo, Motor Traffic, and Coastal Lights received no attention at all. All this illustrates the ineffectiveness with which certain instruments of parliamentary supervision of administration are employed in Ceylon.

Despite these criticisms, the general view is that it had served a useful function. Dr. N. M. Perera, the present Minister of Finance, has stated that 'Ministers have been at their wit's end to go carefully through their estimates studying all the details of their proposals and be ready to answer any question that might be put to them. It has made the Committee Stage alive, interesting and useful. Much wasteful expenditure has been avoided as a result of this detailed criticism. Ministers have found that they could not get away with vague generalisations, that they could be pinned down point by point'.¹² The truth of this assessment could be illustrated by a number of examples. The procedure is to propose a cut in respect of a sub-head, and thereby the opportunity was seized to discuss the department or specifically the officer who came under the particular item, or amendments were moved to obtain information. Thus, in one instance, a member moved that 'the Vote be reduced by Rs. 10/- in respect of sub-head—Puisne Judges'. The same member, in fact, stated that he needs 'some information with regard to the remuneration of Puisne Judges'.¹³ If this appears to indicate that the members were conscious of their lack of knowledge of such points, the main reason for this is the form in which the estimates are presented. Not much supplementary information is appended to estimates in Ceylon. An explanatory note on the variations in the year's figures could reduce the number of questions that may be asked. In addition, the estimates run to about 800 closely printed pages, and very few members go through each and every item. Ministers of Finance have established the practice of submitting a 'Survey of the Economy' report along with the Annual Budget. This report, though a useful source of information, does not serve a special function in the discussion of the budgetary proposals. As a result of the lack of information members tend to indulge in detailed criticism, and this has become a source of irritation for Ministers. Again the practice of members to ask questions on matters of detail is equally irksome to Ministers who, as a result, find it difficult to discuss some of the important principles and issues involved. Successive Speakers have strived to establish the function of the Committee Stage, by repeatedly reminding the members that they must address themselves to matters that are within the knowledge of the Ministers,¹⁴ but to no avail for the trend continues, and members still attempt to control the bureaucracy and examine the performance of the administration, through detailed criticism, at the Committee Stage.

12. Perera, N. M. *op. cit.*, p. 26.

13. *Hansard* (H of R) Vol. 6, column 1417.

14. *Hansard* (H of R.) Vol. 22, column 757.

Supplementary Estimates

Supplementary Estimates form yet another stage at which the departments and the bureaucracy come under parliamentary supervision. 'There are Supplementary Estimates', stated Dr. N. M. Perera, 'which in Ceylon have become a very useful opportunity for the average member to draw the attention of Government to any administrative shortcomings on the part of the Government or policy shortcomings'.¹⁵ It was the large turnover of Supplementary Estimates, which perhaps encouraged members to utilise the occasion for the examination of the performance of departments. For example, in the financial year 1953-54, as many as 108 supplementary estimates were passed, and in addition, 5 such estimates were outstanding. They dealt with the finances of 53 departments.¹⁶ The increase in supplementary estimates has been due to the adoption of the procedure current in the Donoughmore period. Jennings, referring to this, stated that 'the State Council regarded the sub-heads as binding on the Departments: but this produced a ludicrous situation that a Supplementary Estimate was often proposed to increase the expenditure on a sub-head although there were savings on the other sub-heads and no Supplementary Estimate was legally required. The result was to increase enormously the number of Supplementary Estimates, and most of them were quite unnecessary legally'.¹⁷ Though some of these suggestions have been adopted, they are still a recurring feature in Ceylon. Its undesirability was often emphasised, and Mr. Felix Dias Bandaranaike, as Minister of Finance, in the course of a Budget Speech, argued that 'not in the case of the last budget but also in the case of every budget in the last several years the scale on which Supplementary Estimates have been presented to this House shows a deplorable indifference on the part of the Government to the responsibility of revealing from year to year the true financial position of the country and the true financial implications of the Government's proposed undertakings'.¹⁸ This, in effect, represented a stricture on the competence of the bureaucracy. Officials have failed in the determination of expenditure, and more particularly, they suffer from the notion that it is possible at any moment to go to the legislature to obtain approval for supplementary provision. Also the frequent transfers of departments from one Ministry to another have interfered with correct forecasting of expenditure.

The resort to Supplementary Estimates is indicative of the fact that the figures presented at the budget were not correctly drawn up in the first instance. In certain cases, the virement power was used, and savings were transferred from one sub-head to another sub-head. In 1954-55, there were about 1,800

15. *vide* Dr. N. M. Perera's comments in *Constitution and Public Finance in Ceylon* (Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ceylon, Colombo, 1964) p. 22.

16. *Hansard*. (H of R) Vol. 20, 1953-54, column 407.

17. Jennings, Ivor. *op. cit.*, p. 116.

18. Quoted in Jayawardane, N. U. *Public Finance in Ceylon* (Colombo, 1964), p. 207.

sub-heads, and the virement power was exercised in 473 cases.¹⁹ Yet a number of Supplementary Estimates came before the House, and the opportunity was used to make comments by way of criticism of the sums asked for, and always in the form of pointing out the methods by which the money is to be expended. The debate on a Supplementary Estimate, though the rule was to concentrate on the subject matter of the estimate, dealt with a variety of matters pertaining to the particular department. This, as pointed out by Sir Ivor Jennings, was another legacy of the Donoughmore system.²⁰ The members of the Opposition dominated these discussions, and one or two of them made it a practice to refer to a variety of administrative matters. It was perhaps this feature which made this instrument of parliamentary supervision effective in the Ceylonese context.

Private Member Motions

‘There are private member motions which incidentally also provide some sort of control for they may be pleading for a particular line of policy’.²¹ This assessment by Dr. N. M. Perera needs further explanation to see whether such motions exercise a ‘definite control’. In the period 1948-56, 116 private member motions were tabled, and they reflected both constituency-grievances and administrative matters. A large number of such resolutions dealt with policy issues, and some of them were subsequently incorporated in Government legislation. Of the 116 motions, 36 dealt with policy problems; they either sought changes or implementation of new proposals, on issues such as the nationalisation of bus transport, the take-over of foreign owned plantations, unemployment, swabasha policy, and US planes refuelling in Ceylon. These not only contained political overtones, but the discussion also provided opportunities for the examination of the performance of the administration. The constituency-grievances attracted nearly 39 private member’s motions during this period, and some of them dealt with such specific needs as the anicuts in Welimada, landless peasants in Kandy, a new Post Office for Dehiwala, the housing problem of the apothecary at Maldeniya Rural Hospital etc. Such motions provided the members with the opportunity to examine the policy of the department, and at the same time to criticise the bureaucracy for their lethargy, negligence and inefficiency. The members, when introducing such motions, often make statements such as these—‘No action has been taken in the last 2½ years by the Department of Agriculture’.²² The motion, therefore, was introduced in order to draw the attention of the Government to the slowness of the pace of village expansion schemes. There were occasions on which they referred to particular officials. A member, speaking on his motion, said that ‘I could not meet the Director of Medical and Sanitary Services. The

19. *Hansard* (H of R) Vol. 18, 1954-55. column 403

20. Jennings, Ivor. *op. cit.*, p. 117.

21. Perera, N. M. *Constitution and Public Finance in Ceylon*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

22. *Hansard* (H of R) Vol. 9, column 735.

papers are suppressed by the Deputy Director.²³ Such allegations are not infrequent at these discussions, and therefore, the instrument of the private members' motions kept the bureaucracy alert and sensitive to the needs of the constituencies.

These motions emanated largely from the members of the Opposition, and the Government, in the early years of parliamentary Government, was hostile to such motions. They rarely provided the House with a quorum to discuss the motions, and even the Ministers concerned did not take any interest to be present in the House. The Opposition, on the other hand, fought tenaciously for the recognition of this parliamentary opportunity, and it was able to obtain a certain amount of assistance from Speaker Melamure.²⁴ Two or three members from the Opposition always spoke on such motions. The effective utilisation of this opportunity by them influenced the members of the Government Parliamentary Party to introduce motions, which primarily dealt with electoral needs. For instance, members of the Government Party tabled five or six motions at a time, and practically every one of them dealt with constituency matters. Apart from their impact on the Government and the bureaucracy, it helped in the recognition of this occasion as a legitimate parliamentary opportunity of the private member.

Votes of No Confidence

The formula of the Vote of No Confidence, which the Opposition successfully utilised to embarrass the party in power, formed yet another instrument of parliamentary control. There were periodical censure motions sponsored by a party, or by a group of parties or the Opposition as a whole, though sometimes divisions within the ranks of the Opposition imposed limitations. They dealt with defects in the Government, in the administration and the inadequacy of governmental policy and executive control, and reference to these aspects demanded discussion over both specific and general issues. In the period 1948-70, 18 such motions were tabled in the House of Representatives, and it would be useful to examine the issues involved.

11 out of 18 censure motions expressed lack of confidence in Government, while the rest was tabled to censure individual Ministers for their acts of commission and omission. The Votes of No Confidence in Government dealt primarily with policy issues, the discussion of which created embarrassment for both the Government and the bureaucracy. The Opposition moved a motion of No Confidence in the Government over the issue of a budget leakage in December 1948. At the budget debate, it was pointed out by the Opposition that there had been a leakage of budget secrets, and they demanded the appointment of a Committee of investigation.²⁵ This Committee held that a definite leakage had

23. *Hansard*. (H of R) Vol. 16, column 2365

24. *Hansard*. (H of R) Vol. 7, column 1207

25. *Hansard* (H of R) Vol. 5, 1948-49, column 600

taken place and the Opposition seized this opportunity to table a censure motion on the Ministry of Finance. In the course of the debate, the Minister, the Permanent Secretary and the officials of the Treasury and the Department of Customs were pilloried.

Such issues as allegations against a Minister in the Cabinet, the attitude of the Government towards members of the public service, the utilisation of the machinery of Government for party purposes, the cost of living, the continuation of emergency powers etc. became subjects for censure motions, and the policy of the Government, the performance of a particular Minister and officials came under attack. The Government, knowing the impact of these censure motions, attempted in many an instance to prevent a discussion. Some excuse, constitutional or tactical, was used to achieve this objective. A point of order was raised when a Vote of No Confidence dealing with the dissatisfaction of the public servants was tabled in the House, and the original motion was amended to suit the constitutional position regarding the Public Service Commission.²⁶ There were occasions when they refused to debate certain censure motions because of the 'nature of political embarrassment' inherent in them.²⁷ However, the strategy of the Vote of No Confidence has been effectively utilised by the Parliamentary Opposition in Ceylon. Its impact has been fairly effective in controlling the bureaucracy and making Government sensitive to the needs of the people. This strategy could have been more successful and effective if the Opposition had displayed the characteristics of an alternative Government.

Questions

Seven Standing Orders govern conditions relating to the Question Time in the House of Representatives, and Standing Order No. 36 imposes a number of restrictions on the right to ask questions.²⁸ The object of a question is to seek information; not more than half an hour is allocated to questions and no member is entitled to ask more than three questions for oral answer on any day. This is now insufficient because there are 156 members to avail themselves of this opportunity. In addition to the three questions which a member is entitled to ask on any one day, each member has the right to put three supplementary questions to each question. There are not too many supplementaries in Ceylon, and the reason is the lack of sufficient information.²⁹ Question Time, however, is overburdened in Ceylon, and it is in this context that conditions of admissibility assume a certain degree of importance. Standing Order No. 37 empowers the Speaker to decide admissibility and there are eleven rules which could be used to determine admissibility. The advantage of these rules is that the Speaker may be able to allow a manageable number of questions on any one day.

26. *Hansard* (H of R) Vol. 9, 1950-51. Column 13.

27. *Hansard* (H of R) Vol. 11, 1951-52, Column 376.

28. *vide* Standing Orders of the House of Representatives.

29. Perera, N. M. *Constitution and Public Finance in Ceylon, op. cit.*, p. 22.

In Ceylon, all questions appearing in the Order Paper are not taken up, and something in the range of 23 questions are put down for answer. This, it is said, has been adopted in order to defend the right of the members in asking supplementary questions.³⁰ During the first two Parliaments, the number of questions increased, and as many as 3944 questions were answered in the House of Representatives. 3025 of them were oral questions, and the written and supplementary questions numbered 718 and 201 respectively. The growth of governmental powers and the expansion in the organisation of Government encouraged the members to seek information; the need to share the 'pork-barrel' was perhaps the basic reason for this increase in the number of questions. The extension of social and economic welfare affected their electoral interests, which demanded a dialogue between the bureaucracy and the politicians. The delay in the realisation of this dialogue, in effect, compelled the members of Parliament to ask questions in regard to the performance of the bureaucracy. The constituency-grievances were more often than not related to things pertaining to the administration, and therefore the members specialised in matters of administrative detail.

Questions, as in the House of Commons, were used as an element in the doctrine of individual Ministerial responsibility. In respect of this, the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives stated that 'questions relating to public affairs may be put to the Prime Minister or to any Minister or Parliamentary Secretary relating to subjects with which the member questioned is concerned'.³¹ The problem of Ministerial responsibility arose from the official actions of Ministers and Departments, and questions relating to his authority and responsibility help to keep the Minister within the confines of his specific powers. In Ceylon, a great deal of their powers are laid down in Acts of Parliament, and this assists both the Minister and the member to remain in the respective areas of authority.

Number of Oral questions asked in respect of Ministries during the first two Parliaments.*

	1947-1952 <i>First Parliament</i>	1952-1956 <i>Second Parliament</i>
Local Government & Health	131	303
Education	103	268
Defence & External Affairs	86	93
Agriculture & Lands	59	207
Transport	58	129
Finance	54	115
Labour	52	71
Industries	35	39
Home Affairs	31	105
Food	31	101
Justice	17	18
Posts	12	45
Total	669	1474

30. *Hansard* (H of R) Vol. 3, column 623.

31. Standing Orders of the House of Representatives.

*For the compilation of this data, Hansards were perused, and the questions were counted on the basis of their relationship to Ministries. The changes in the allocation of subjects in the Cabinets were taken into consideration.

It will be seen from the above table that in the years 1947-52, the Ministries of Education, Health and Local Government, Agriculture and Lands, Labour and Social Services, Defence and External Affairs, and Food and Cooperatives received the greatest attention while Justice, Posts, Finance and Commerce received very scant attention. This is understandable in view of the fact that Education, Health, and Local Government were directly engaged in social welfare, and their impact was felt quite acutely at the constituency level. In such areas of governmental activity, parliamentary supervision through oral questions, in fact, came to be exercised effectively. In 1952-56, as indicated in the table, question time came to be more widely used, and the basic reason was the emerging unity in the ranks of the Opposition. Though this had an impact on the use of parliamentary opportunities, the questions asked in the House displayed the same trend. Such Ministries as Education, Health, Local Government, Lands, Agriculture and Food, etc. invited more questions. Also there was the desire of the ordinary member to seek information, often on matters relating to his constituency. This, however, does not mean that issues of policy were not involved at Question Time. Questions, though used largely to ventilate electoral grievances and partially as a basic parliamentary strategy, functioned as a valuable method of parliamentary supervision of administration.

Adjournment Hour

In addition to Questions, the half hour adjournment may be used to discuss the affairs of Ministries and departments. According to Standing Order 18, a member could move 'the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance'.³² Despite this particular requirement, matters pertaining to Ministries and Departments are taken up for discussion. Though some of these adjournment motions were useful in drawing attention of Ministers to minor deficiencies of various Departments, they rarely referred to 'definite' matters of urgent public importance. In fact, routine matters of administration came to be discussed during this half hour, and its original function underwent a change to make it another Question Time.

On the Half Hour Adjournment, 657 issues have been debated during the period 1947-56. These motions concentrated heavily on matters of administrative detail, and it was this aspect which needed to be investigated. An average of 5 to 10 members competed at adjournment hour to initiate a discussion on some matter, and the daily average of issues raised varied between 5 and 10. The interest with which certain issues were raised at adjournment hour shows the political significance of the Ministries and Departments. In the period 1947-56, after the Prime Minister (103 adjournment motions discussed matters pertaining to his Ministry) followed the Minister of Food with 71, the Minister of Education with 68, the Minister of Health and Local Government

32. Standing Orders of the House of Representatives.

with 61, the Minister of Agriculture and Lands with 60, the Minister of Finance with 50, the Minister of Labour and Social Services with 38, the Minister of Transport with 37, the Minister of Trade with 35 whilst the Minister of Industries received only 27 and the Ministry of Posts only 14. It would be difficult to say that all these adjournment motions discussed matters of public importance, and this increase in such motions suggests that in Ceylon the adjournment hour functioned more in the form of a 'postponed Question Time'.³³ The explanation for this is that the conventional rules pertaining to Question Time imposed certain limitations, and therefore, this parliamentary device was used in the form of another Question Time. There is also the fact that all parochial problems could be raised at Question Time, and this perhaps brought in a number of constituency-oriented issues at adjournment time. Despite these characteristics, the fact remains that these debates enabled useful information to be obtained and examined without making too heavy a demand on the time of the House or on Ministers and their officials. The Ministers, though they accommodated these motions, were seldom very enthusiastic about them and some of them often allowed the discussion to be led by his deputy. Yet, the adjournment hour, even in the form of an extended Question Time, has served a useful function in exercising some form of control over the bureaucracy in Ceylon.

All this indicates, that Ceylon, in the course of her parliamentary history, has evolved a procedure that is unique to Ceylon. It is this aspect which makes it difficult to examine the Ceylonese system exclusively from the point of view of the conventions available at Westminster. The Ceylonese interpretation is that all these instruments of parliamentary control of administration have functioned successfully. The heterogeneity of the Opposition, however, minimised the efficacy of these parliamentary opportunities.

33. Weerawardene, I. D. S. *The Senate of Ceylon At Work*. (University of Ceylon, 1955) p. 25.