

Arrack, Toddy and Ceylonese Nationalism: Some Observations on the Temperance Movement, 1912-1921

By TISSA FERNANDO

Introduction

This paper¹ makes no claim to being an exhaustive study of the prohibition campaign of early 20th century Ceylon. Such a study is long overdue, for scholars on Ceylon have inexplicably neglected this important social movement which had such a major impact on Ceylon politics of this period. In this paper I attempt to throw some light on the organization of the campaign, especially on the role of its western educated leadership. I have also attempted to assess the achievements of the movement and the impact of the movement on the broader nationalist agitation.

The Excise Ordinance of 1912

The abolition of the existing system of excise in Ceylon and the introduction of the system in force in Madras Presidency were recommended to the Colonial Office by Governor McCallum in October 1908. The Secretary of State approved the change but wanted the scheme brought before the Legislative Council for discussion. On 7 April 1909, the Legislative Council approved the proposal and in September, 1909, R. M. Thurley, Assistant Commissioner of the Madras Salt, Abkari and Customs Department and B. Horsburgh of the Ceylon Civil Service were appointed to report on how the Madras system of excise could be introduced into Ceylon.²

According to existing arrangements,³ the production of arrack⁴ was by the "outstill system" whereby liquor was produced in some two

1. This is a revised version of a paper presented to the Ceylon Studies Seminar, University of Ceylon, on 7 June 1970. I am grateful to members of this seminar for their valuable comments.

2. See, *Ceylon Hansard*, 1909, 7 April 1909 and *S.P.* 1, (1911), *Proposed Excise System for Ceylon*.

Changing the existing excise system had been recommended by F. R. Ellis in his report on the system of farming rents *S.P.* XXXI (1897), but it was only in Governor McCallum's term of office (1907-13) that the question of excise reforms was taken up once more. McCallum sent the Controller of Revenue, H. L. Crawford, to Madras to report on the system followed over there. Crawford submitted a memorandum recommending the abolition of the existing system and its replacement by the system of excise prevailing in the Madras Presidency. It was as a result of Crawford's report that Thurley and Horsburgh were called upon to draw up a scheme for Ceylon on the Madras model.

3. *Sessional Paper XXXI* (1897), *System of Farming Arrack Rents* (Report of F. R. Ellis). *Sessional Papers* are hereafter referred to as *S.P.*

4. In Ceylon usage refers generally to a spirit distilled from fermented coconut toddy.

hundred and fifty small and scattered stills (mainly along the coastal belt of the island), licensed but otherwise uncontrolled. Distribution was through "renting," the monopoly of the retail sale in defined areas being sold to the highest bidder who was known as the "renter." As for toddy,⁵ its supply and distribution were subject to no legal control and were in that sense "outside the law." In practice, however, the renting system gave the monopoly of retail sale of both arrack and toddy to the "arrack renter," who either re-sold the toddy to sub-renters or kept the toddy in his taverns, pushing the sale of arrack at the expense of toddy by keeping the retail price of the latter disproportionately high. In either case, the arrack renter enjoyed the revenue from toddy in addition to his profits from arrack, and this was a source of revenue that proved attractive to the government. It is clear from their Report that Horsburgh and Thurley were concerned with this new source of revenue and were interested in devising a means of channelling the money from toddy for the government's use. They observed, "it is absolutely certain that Government does not get its fair share of revenue that should accrue from the actual toddy consumption, if, indeed, it gets any share at all, the renter in this case being generally supposed to omit toddy altogether from his rent collections." The Report blamed the government for the existing state of affairs which did not provide the consumer with any "legitimate" means of obtaining toddy.⁶

The Madras excise system had the following features radically different from the system existing in Ceylon:⁷

- (a) the complete separation of the sale of arrack and toddy.
- (b) concentration of distillation, by the establishment of a few large distilleries.
- (c) a fixed duty per proof gallon before arrack was sold.

5. A relatively mild liquor derived from the coconut and palmyra palms.

6. *S.P.* I (1911), p. 3.

7. When the Dutch controlled the maritime provinces of Ceylon (1658-1796) they established a remunerative overseas trade in arrack with places as diverse as Penang, Singapore, Madras, Bombay, Malabar and the Coromandal Coast. The British tried to maintain this trade but met with little success, especially after 1813. This was partly due to prohibitive tariff restrictions and excise duties imposed by importing countries and partly due to competition from Batavian and Coromandal arrack. The result was that the British had to depend on local consumption for revenue. Thus, although the Dutch had prohibited the sale of arrack to the Kandyan kingdom, the British extended the renting system into the Kandyan provinces and also established new taverns throughout the country. The British also consolidated the laws relating to excise by Ordinance No. 5 of 1834 which was superseded by Ordinance No. 10 of 1844. Licences were required for tapping *fermented* toddy for consumption and for arrack manufacture. The distillation and wholesale distribution of arrack were also controlled by licences, while retail sale was given to 'renters,' who bought the right at public auctions or by tender. Renters purchase a 'revenue farm' which gave them control over the retailing sale of a specified area: they usually sub-let individual taverns. The arrack was obtained by renters direct from numerous small, unhygienic and decrepit 'stills.'

- (d) the division of the country into contract supply areas, for the wholesale supply of which one of the distilleries had a monopoly.
- (e) sale by auction of the right to sell arrack at each tavern separately, i.e., the abolition of the renting system.
- (f) the division of the country into toddy selling areas and the sale by auction of the right to sell toddy within each area.
- (g) arrack revenue from a fixed duty per gallon and tavern rents; toddy revenue from a fixed tree tax and tavern rents.

It is clear that on considerations of revenue the Madras system was attractive to government, and it is probable that this was a strong motive for the proposed changes. The government, however, was reluctant to acknowledge fiscal considerations and even claimed that the reforms would result in loss of revenue and an increase in expenditure. The government's motive, according to McCallum, was its "moral obligation to make a beginning in the direction of dealing with the evil of drink in this Colony."⁸ He emphasized that the goal of reduced consumption could be achieved only by government's control of the manufacture, distribution and sale of liquor throughout the island. Although the government thought it judicious to play down the revenue factor, the European-owned *Times of Ceylon* expressed what could well have been also the official expectations: "We hope that one effect of the new proposals will be to increase the revenue and we see nothing inconsistent in this and a real desire to make the people more sober."⁹ The revenue aspect of the reforms was obvious and a Ceylonese-owned daily commented: "The most superficial man can see that this scheme has been devised more with a view to increasing the revenue rather than with any intention of serving the best interests of the country."¹⁰

The Horsburgh-Thurley Report was submitted to government on 16 July 1910 and was unanimously approved by the Executive Council. However, due to the "vast amount of work, both legislative and administrative" that had to precede the implementation of the recommendations, it was decided to continue the existing system until 30 June 1912.¹¹ The Excise Ordinance embodying the new scheme was finally adopted by the Legislative Council in May 1912,¹² replacing an ordinance in existence since 1844.

8. S.P. XLII (1912), *The Ceylonese Excise System*, McCallum to Harcourt, No. 333, 13 June 1912.

9. *Times of Ceylon*, 13 Feb. 1911, editorial.

10. *Ceylonese*, 10 June 1913, editorial.

11. C.O. 54/736, McCallum to Crewe, No. 540, 7 Sept. 1910.

12. *Ceylon Hansard*, 1912, 31 May 1912.

The opposition to the proposed changes was voiced as soon as they were known to the Ceylonese public. There were many aspects of the Madras system which were not popular in Ceylon, but the action which aroused most criticism was the establishment of separate toddy shops. An early critic of the new scheme was a leading Ceylonese physician and proprietary planter, Marcus Fernando, who stressed that the idea of encouraging temperance and at the same time obtaining a large revenue from alcoholic consumption was "bound to prove a signal failure".¹³ The government invited criticism by its own actions which were not always well considered or tactful. For instance, while the new Bill was under discussion in the Legislative Council, the government proceeded to establish, under the old ordinance that was about to be repealed, an enormous number of new toddy taverns numbering well over a thousand. "The general public is said to have been unaware of the whole proceeding until after it had become an accomplished fact."¹⁴

The government claimed that the separation of the vend of arrack and toddy was a fundamental feature of the proposed reforms, for until separation was achieved arrack would be pushed at the expense of toddy. Theoretically, toddy was available at every arrack tavern, but in practice this was not always so, since the sale of arrack was more profitable to tavern keepers. There were, however, numerous places where fermented toddy was sold illicitly, and government claimed that their plan was merely to establish places where toddy could be obtained legally, in order to suppress this illicit sale. The government further argued that the increase in the availability of liquor was more apparent than real because (a) toddy was no longer to be available in arrack taverns, and (b) there would be a reduction in illicit sales.¹⁵

Despite assurances by government, the opening of so many toddy shops was viewed by some Ceylonese leaders as a national calamity. Thus, in addition to 845 arrack taverns in existence, the government introduced 1,072 new toddy taverns by June, 1912.¹⁶ In October 1912, their number had increased to 1,167.¹⁷ The anxiety felt in Ceylon was shared by the Secretary of State who declared: "... I cannot view without some concern so considerable an addition to the number of premises licensed for the sale of alcoholic liquors...",¹⁸ but he went no further than to advise the government to reduce the number of taverns when it was practicable to

13. *Ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1910.

14. *S.P.* XLII (1912), enclosure in Harcourt to McCallum, No. 326, 26 July 1912. Deputation to the Secretary of State from the Native Races and Liquor Traffic United Committee.

15. *S.P.* XLII (1912), McCallum to Harcourt, No. 333, 13 June 1912.

16. *Idem.*

17. *S.P.* XLIV (1912), *Arrack and Toddy Taverns*, p. 29.

18. *S.P.* XLII (1912), Harcourt to McCallum, No. 326, 26 July 1912.

do so. Although reluctant to reprimand the local authorities, there is no doubt that the Colonial Office disapproved of the manner in which these toddy shops were introduced. Lord Emmott, the Parliamentary Under Secretary, minuted: "There is no getting away from the fact as it seems to me that this enormous number of toddy licenses was an error and done in unnecessary haste and without due consideration."¹⁹

The Western Educated Elite and the Temperance Campaign

The campaign against the Excise Reforms was organised and led by western educated Ceylonese who were quick to realise that in a Buddhist country public anxiety could be exploited on an issue like this in order to embarrass the government. In fact, public fears were sometimes extreme as, for example, the complaint that "the amount of toddy drinking to be encouraged through the new system of opening taverns at every corner will raise a generation of physically deformed men..."²⁰ One newspaper even claimed that the people of Ceylon were being "slowly converted into a nation of drunkards."²¹

The campaign of the Ceylonese leaders was, on the whole, more sophisticated and took the form of a reasoned debate with the government. They did not hesitate to give the government credit where credit was due, as for example, on the decision to eliminate the renter and to exercise greater control over the distribution and sale of liquor.²² However, they were equally insistent on exposing some of the assumptions on which the new scheme was based.²³ Particularly vulnerable was the assumption that the new toddy shops would eliminate illicit sales, for it was well known that "the illicit booths are the satellites of licensed taverns, depending upon them and deriving from the licenses the spirit they vend. Hence, an increase of taverns means a proportionate increase in the illicit traffic..."²⁴ Since there was inadequate reason to think that the separation of arrack and toddy would eliminate illicit sales, it became natural to suspect the government's motives. It was thus widely believed that the "decision to keep the sales separate [was] intended to encourage the consumption of toddy for revenue purposes."²⁵

19. C.O. 54/766, Lord Emmott's minute, 22 Feb. 1913.

20. *Times of Ceylon*, 16 Jan. 1911, letter by 'S'.

21. *Ceylonese*, 4 June 1914, editorial.

22. For example, *Ceylon Independent*, 15 April 1912, editorial.

23. Although there was no movement in the 19th century comparable to what I describe in this paper it is important to note that temperance ideology was an integral aspect of Buddhist revivalism in the second half of the 19th century. Hence, the ground had in a sense already been prepared for a concerted campaign.

24. *Ibid.*, 24 April 1912, letter by Dr. Marcus Fernando. Also letter by Dr. John Attygalle on 16 April 1912.

25. *Ibid.*, 9 May 1912, editorial.

The public protest meeting was a popular device of the Ceylonese elite to rally mass support. On the 21st May 1912 a public meeting was held in Colombo to protest against the excise policy.²⁶ On the 25th May another meeting was held attended by about 1500 persons.²⁷ On the 4th June, a protest meeting was held in Nuwara Eliya,²⁸ and similar meetings were held in several of the large towns of Ceylon including Moratuwa, Alutigama, Mirigama, Kalutara, Chilaw, Hantota, Tangalle, Kurunagala and Matara. These meetings were organized by the western educated elite.²⁹ The most important of these meetings was the one held in Colombo on 15th June 1912 with James Peiris in the chair.³⁰ A protest meeting of Buddhists was held on 25th July 1912, and it was at this meeting that the decision was taken to form a central temperance society in Colombo to guide the island-wide temperance campaign.³¹ On the 18th November 1912, the Low Country Products Association, the main commercial organization of the Ceylonese, condemned the toddy scheme.³² Similarly, the government's excise policy was condemned by the Jaffna Association, the principal organization of western educated Tamils of the north.³³

The holding of protest meetings had hardly any effect on the local authorities and the Ceylonese leaders were compelled to seek redress in memorials to the Colonial Office. One of the early memorials of protest was sent by the Friends Mission in Ceylon.³⁴ The Low Country Products Association sent two memorials to the Secretary of State.³⁵ In the memorial sent by the committee appointed by the protest meeting held in Colombo on 15th June 1912, it was argued that the proposed reforms would lead to "increased facilities for the consumption of alcohol."³⁶ This memorial also called for a Royal Commission to inquire into the working of the Excise Ordinance. The Plumbago Merchants Union had more mercenary

26. *Ibid.*, 23 May 1912.

27. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1912. Among the speakers at this meeting were F. R. Senanayake, Anagarika Dharmapala, C. Batuwantudawe and John de Silva.

28. *Ibid.*, 7 June 1912.

29. For example, the protest meeting at Matara was organized mainly by lawyers; see *ibid.*, 18 June 1912.

30. *Ibid.*, 17 June 1912. The large gathering present at this meeting included many prominent members of the contemporary elite—E. J. Samarawickrame (Advocate), Arthur Alvis (Proctor), C. P. Dias (Headmaster), Dr. Solomon Fernando, Dr. (Mrs.) Ratnam, D. S. Senanayake, Dr. C. W. Van Geysel, E. W. Perera, H. L. de Mel (Proctor), R. L. Pereira (Advocate), J. G. C. Mendis (Headmaster), and Armand de Souza (Editor of the 'Morning Leader').

31. *Ibid.*, 29 July 1912.

32. *Ibid.*, 19 Nov. 1912.

33. *Ceylonese*, 12 June 1913.

34. C.O. 54/745, Clifford to Harcourt, No. 560, 13 Sept. 1911.

35. *Ceylon Independent*, 18 April 1912 and C. G. 54/761, enclosure in Stubbs to Harcourt, No. 167, 20 March 1913.

36. *Ceylon Independent*, 11 July 1912.

C.O. 54/755, enclosure in McCallum to Harcourt, No. 633, 17 Oct. Memorial signed by James Peiris and the Rev. W. J. Noble.

objections to the new scheme. Their memorial emphasized that the new scheme would "increase very materially the facilities for intemperance afforded to their labour and thus... add a new element of grave danger to the industry..."³⁷ Opposition to the Excise Bill was also expressed in a memorial sent by the Buddhist clergy, signed by 4,478 high priests and monks of Ceylon.³⁸ In their memorial, the inhabitants of the Hapitigam Korale of the Negombo District asked that they "be delivered from the newly established temptation to drink introduced in their midst under the new Excise scheme."³⁹ A memorial was also sent on behalf of the meeting of Buddhists held on 25 May 1912, in which it was argued that "whereas a drinker of toddy may give it up for the stronger liquor, arrack, it is extremely rare, and they are not aware of a single instance, where an arrack drinker has given up the stronger drink for that of toddy."⁴⁰ Similarly, the Ceylon Excise Reform Association lodged their protests and called for an independent inquiry.⁴¹ A memorial signed by 236 prominent residents of Ceylon was also sent to the Secretary of State. The signatories of this memorial were a large number of foreign missionaries, and a cross-section of the Ceylonese elite including 32 barristers and advocates, 50 proctors and notaries, 21 doctors and 14 landed proprietors.⁴²

The lobbying in England

Protest meetings and memorials to the Colonial Office did not prove as effective as was hoped and the Ceylonese elite therefore resorted to direct campaigning in Britain. A delegation of Ceylonese left for England to put their case before temperance organizations and influential persons both inside and outside the House of Commons. The Native Races and Liquor Traffic United Committee was one of the associations approached, and they were quick to take up the cause of Ceylonese temperance workers. In February 1912, the United Committee appealed to the Colonial Office not to sanction the new excise scheme as it "would be seriously injurious to the native population."⁴³ The assurances given by the Colonial Office did not satisfy the United Committee, which continued to insist that the "recommendations are calculated to make worse instead of better the present condition of affairs."⁴⁴ On 22 July 1912 a deputation of its mem-

37. C.O. 54/753, enclosure in McCallum to Harcourt, No. 459, 21 Aug. 1912.

38. *Ibid.*, McCallum to Harcourt, No. 458, 21 Aug. 1912.

39. C.O. 54/755, enclosure in McCallum to Harcourt, No. 648, 29 Oct. 1912.

40. *Ibid.*, enclosure in McCallum to Harcourt, No. 692, 30 Oct. 1912, Memorial signed by W. A. de Silva, C. Batuwantudawa, F. R. Senarayake and A. Mendis.

41. C.O. 54/764, enclosure in Stubbs to Harcourt, No. 591, 24 Sept. 1913. The Excise Reform Association was formed by the elite to oppose the new scheme.

42. C.O. 54/760, Stubbs to Harcourt, No. 94, 13 Feb. 1913.

43. C.O. 54/758, J. Newton, Secretary, United Committee to Harcourt, 2 Feb. 1912.

44. *Ibid.*, J. Newton to Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18 March 1912. Also see, *ibid.*, J. Newton to Secretary of State, 12 May 1912.

bers,⁴⁵ led by Sir Herbert Roberts, M.P., met the Secretary of State for the Colonies to discuss the new excise scheme for Ceylon. The deputation also included representatives of the Ceylonese elite—D. B. Jayatilaka, Dr. Marcus Fernando, Dr. David Rockwood, Dr. C. A. Hewavitarana, H. C. Sproule and D. R. Wijewardene. Stubb's biographical notes on the Ceylonese in the deputation reveal that the Colonial Office was kept well informed on personal matters concerning Ceylonese leaders. He refers to Fernando as "an exceptionally able and well informed man." to Sproule as "a truculent, fluent and witty talker with an outstanding knowledge of scandal" and to Rockwood as "a bounder right away from the word 'jump.'⁴⁶"

The arguments adduced by the deputation were typical of the general objections to the government's scheme, and were especially concerned with the proposals for separate toddy taverns and for government owned distilleries. They pointed out that the large increase in taverns implied an increased temptation to drink and an increased difficulty in controlling sales. They also disapproved of establishing government distilleries; "The traffic will appear as having Government sanction and approval, as it does in India, and so will obtain an additional attraction."⁴⁷ Marcus Fernando criticized the government's method of introducing the taverns: "The wholesale dumping of toddy shops throughout the country, with a suddenness almost dramatic, at the time when the Excise Bill was being considered in the local legislature, has created a profound sensation in the Colony." Fernando stated that "speaking from an experience of over thirty years, I can most emphatically assert that never before in the Island has a government policy received such widespread condemnation and disapproval."⁴⁸ Jayatilaka, speaking on behalf of the Buddhists, criticized the government for its indifference to public opinion on excise matters.⁴⁹ The Secretary of State, Lewis Harcourt, assured the deputation that he was not unsympathetic to their point of view. The establishment of toddy taverns, he pointed out, was merely a device to control the illicit sale of toddy by giving people "legalized toddy," and disagreed that it would lead to increased consumption of liquor.⁵⁰

45. S.P. XLII (1912), enclosure in Harcourt to McCallum, No. 326, 26 July 1912. The deputation consisted of many M.P.s and also included the Rev. W. H. Rigby of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, John Ferguson, C.M.G., a former editor of the 'Ceylon Observer' and a resident of Ceylon for nearly fifty years, and the Rev. G. A. Thompson, Secretary of the Church of England Temperance Society.
46. C.O. 54/759, R. E. Stubb's minute, 15 July 1912.
47. S.P. XLII (1912), enclosure in Harcourt to McCallum, No. 326, 26 July 1912, Statement on behalf of the United Committee read by the Rev. Thompson.
48. *Ibid.*, statement by Dr. Marcus Fernando. As a person connected with Ceylon for 30 years, the Rev. W. H. Rigby was also able to say: 'I do not remember so wide-spread and so strong a feeling against any action of the government as there exists against the proposed licensing policy.'
49. *Ibid.*, statement by D. B. Jayatilaka.
50. *Ibid.*, L. Harcourt's reply.

The lobbying done by the Ceylon delegates in England met with considerable success and proved a source of embarrassment to the Colonial Office. The National Temperance Federation of Britain was another of the associations that actively supported the Ceylonese cause, and made many attempts to influence the Colonial Office.⁵¹ In the period May-October 1915 alone, the Colonial Office received 51 memorials from voluntary bodies in Britain protesting against the excise policy in Ceylon.⁵² These Christian and temperance associations opposed separate toddy shops in the belief that they would give rise to drunkenness and demoralization.⁵³ This missionary spirit of safeguarding the moral welfare of native peoples was the primary motive for these associations joining hands with the Ceylonese elite. But these societies were not devoid of broader humanitarian feelings and were prepared to campaign against acts of injustice committed on colonial peoples, as was revealed in their attitude to the 1915 Riots in Ceylon.⁵⁴ The Ceylonese lobby also worked in the House of Commons and many Members of Parliament were won over to their cause.⁵⁵

Stubbs' General Order to Government Servants

R. E. Stubbs who succeeded Clifford as Colonial Secretary of Ceylon was earlier an official of the Eastern Department of the Colonial Office. He was thus more than familiar with the opposition to the new excise policy both in and outside Ceylon. As an official at the Colonial Office Stubbs was not unsympathetic to the Ceylonese point of view, and on more than one occasion expressed his misgivings on the wisdom of the proposed reforms. With regard to the hasty creation of over a thousand toddy taverns, Stubbs wrote: "It may be admitted that the Ceylon government

51. C.O. 54/758, Charles Smith to Harcourt, 15 Feb. 1912.
C.O. 54/766, Secretary, National Temperance Federation to Harcourt, 13 Feb. 1913.
Ibid., Secretary, National Temperance Federation to Harcourt, 15. Oct. 1914.
C.O. 54/800, Secretary, National Temperance Federation to Bonar Law, 21 Oct. 1916.
52. The following are the associations that sent memorials to the Colonial Office: Christian Endeavour Union; Wesleyan Methodist Church; United Kingdom Alliance; International Order of Good Templars; United Methodist Church; Native Races and Liquor Traffic United Committee; Congregational Church; Western Temperance League; Society of Friends in Ireland; Scottish Christian Union; Irish Women's Temperance Union; Baptist Missionary Society; Band of Hope Union; Church of England Temperance Society; Wesleyan Gospel Temperance Society; Scottish Temperance League; Sons of Temperance; Street Teetotal Society; Evangelical Free Church and the British Women's Temperance Association. See C.O. 54 767 for details.
53. See, for example, the address by the Grand Chief Templar of England to the Native Races and Liquor Traffic United Committee, reported in the *Ceylonese*, 16 June 1914.
54. For further information on the riots, see Tissa Fernando, "The British Raj and the 1915 Communal Riots in Ceylon," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1969, and "The 1915 Riots in Ceylon: A Symposium" in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1970.
55. The Members who asked questions in the House on excise policy in Ceylon were Keir Hardie, Sir John Jardine, Sir Herbert Roberts, H. G. Chancellor, Leif Jones, Ferene, Mitchell-Thomson and L. Ginnell. See *Debates of the House of Commons*, 5th series, vols. XL, XLI, XLIV, XLVI, XLVIII, L, LII, LIII, LIV, LV, LIX, LXXX, LXXXII, LXXXIV.

acted in a tactless and irritating way— I regret to say I think they usually do...”⁵⁶ In July, 1912, after a conversation with Marcus Fernando, Stubbs confessed that he was “rather shaken in the conviction that the Government’s proposals are all for the best.”⁵⁷ And these doubts persisted, for in November 1912 he minuted: “I have really rather an open mind on this question...”⁵⁸ Yet no sooner did he assume duties as Colonial Secretary of Ceylon than his attitude towards the temperance question underwent a conspicuous change. He showed none of his liberal spirit⁵⁹ and was responsible for what was perhaps the most unpopular governmental action during the whole of the temperance episode—a General Order in April, 1913, which was intended to discourage government servants from participating in temperance activity.⁶⁰ The General Order stated that (a) any public servant who wished to join a temperance society must first obtain permission from the head of his department; (b) If permission was granted, it was to be on condition that the officer took no part in the management of the society and that he did not attend public meetings organised by the society; (c) Permission to join temperance societies was not to be given to administrative officers, including headmen.

The government was apparently forced into this arbitrary action by the vehemence of the agitation by the large number of temperance societies that had sprung up throughout the island. Explaining the reason for the Order, Stubbs wrote:

Even in cases where the object of a society is genuinely the furtherance of temperance principles, its methods have frequently been open to grave objection, the weapons of boycotting and intimidation having been freely used; while in other cases Temperance meetings have been made the occasion for incitements to disaffection and for personal abuse of government officers.⁶¹

The restrictions imposed on government servants, he said, were to avoid possible friction between governments and its servants, “since public meetings are only too apt to degenerate into indiscriminate attack on the Government.” Whether these were the real motives behind Stubbs’ action is controversial. What was clear, however, was what would have been the

56. C.O. 54/758, Stubbs’ minute, 23 July 1912.

57. C.O. 54/758, Stubbs’ minute, 1 July 1912.

58. C.O. 54/759, Stubbs’ minute, 29 November 1912.

59. This change was also manifest in his reaction to the 1915 riots. See Tissa Fernando, “The British *Raj* and the 1915 Communal Riots in Ceylon,” *op. cit.*

60. *Ceylon Independent*, 22 April 1913.

61. There was some truth in this assertion. Sir John Kotelawala recalls the temperance activities of his father who was a well-known temperance campaigner in the 1900’s. “Their temperance was of the militant type. When they caught a man who had drunk to excess they would march him through the streets the next day, making him wear a chain of coconut shells, in order to render him an object of ridicule and contempt among the people.” Sir John Kotelawala, *An Asian Prime Minister’s Story*, London, 1956, p. 14.

consequence of the Order. Jayatilaka commented: "No shrewder blow at the temperance movement could have been devised;"⁶² for the movement could not be sustained without the cooperation of government officials, especially the headmen who were a vital element in the temperance organization at the village level. From the point of view of the Ceylonese leaders this Order exposed government's true intentions: "though the ostensible object of the scheme may be to have the control, the real one seems to be not to check consumption of intoxicants but to foster it, and thereby increase the revenue."⁶³

The Ceylonese leaders rose to the occasion once more and organized opposition to the circular with an efficiency that won them a conspicuous victory over the local authorities. On 3 May 1913, they organized a public meeting in Colombo, to condemn the Order and to memorialize the Secretary of State appealing for its withdrawal.⁶⁴ A protest meeting of Buddhists was also held on 4 May 1913.⁶⁵ The Colombo Total Abstinence Central Union was among the many local societies which joined in protest against Stubbs' circular.⁶⁶ In May 1913, Jayatilaka wrote to the Secretary of State denying the government's allegations against temperance societies, and suggested that the true reason for these drastic measures could be "the growing strength of the temperance societies," which being organized and controlled by leading Ceylonese "are therefore likely to be of permanent power in the land."⁶⁷ Jayatilaka was suggesting that Stubbs' action was a retaliatory measure intended to inhibit the growing strength of the western educated elite.

The protests in Ceylon did not seem to have any effect on the government and the Ceylonese leaders were once more compelled to approach temperance societies in Britain and Members of Parliament for assistance. And they were successful in arousing considerable opposition to the government circular among influential persons in Britain. Questions on the Order were asked in the House of Commons by Sir Herbert Roberts⁶⁸ and Mitchell-Thompson.⁶⁹ P. Acton Shaw warned the Secretary of State for the Colonies that the Order was creating a "profound feeling in temperance circles in this country."⁷⁰ Sir Herbert Roberts wanted it conveyed to Harcourt "that there was a very strong feeling in the House among

62. D. B. Jayatilaka, *The Buddhist Temperance Movement: a Vindication and an appeal addressed to the temperance Reformers of the United Kingdom*, London, 1916, p. 2.

63. *Ceylonese*, 24 May 1913, letter from P. Dalagoda.

64. *Ceylon Independent*, 5 May 1913.

65. *Idem*.

66. *Ceylonese*, 14 June 1913.

67. C.O. 54/768, D. B. Jayatilaka to Harcourt, 13 May 1913.

68. *Debates of the House of Commons*, 5th Series, vols. LIII and LIV, 3 and 16 June, 1913.

69. *Ibid.*, vol. LIII, 11 June 1913.

70. C.O. 54/769, P. Acton Shaw to Harcourt, 20 May 1913.

the Liberal and Labour Members on the subject of the recent Temperance Order in Ceylon,"⁷¹ and he further emphasized that the dissatisfaction was shared by a number of Members of the House who were "not directly associated with Temperance work in any way..."⁷² J. S. Higham objected strongly to the Ceylon government's interference with the freedom of public servants,⁷³ and B. R. Cleave commenting on the circular said: "It reads more like an excerpt from the Middle Ages."⁷⁴ Many Christian clergymen in Britain condemned Stubbs' action. The Bishop of Lincoln wrote: "There must be some hideous mistake. Or else there must be something seriously amiss with the Ceylon Government, if its administration cannot be carried on without orders so reactionary and so absurd as this."⁷⁵

Strong as were these pressures brought to bear on the Secretary of State, it would be wrong to conclude that they were responsible for converting him to a point of view sympathetic to the Ceylonese agitation. The fact was that Harcourt needed no pressure from outside, for he was by his own admission, "a life long temperance worker."⁷⁶ He expressed his horror at the Ceylon government's "monstrous interference,"⁷⁷ long before receiving many of these representations. As early as 16 May 1913, Harcourt minuted: "I cannot imagine any reason which could justify a prohibition of public servants from joining Temperance societies. Somebody must have gone mad in Ceylon and perhaps bitten others."⁷⁸ By 23 May he had definitely decided not to sanction the Order,⁷⁹ but postponed making this public until he received Stubbs' explanatory despatch. Stubbs, meanwhile, realising the strength of the opposition against him, withdrew the Order⁸⁰ before receiving instructions from the Colonial Office. This was a major victory for the temperance movement and it was achieved largely by the efficient lobbying carried out by representatives of the Ceylonese elite in Britain.

71. C.O. 54/766, H. A. Beckett to Harcourt, 20 May 1913.

72. *Ibid.*, Herbert Roberts to Harcourt, 20 May 1913.

73. C.O. 54/768, Higham to Harcourt, 2 June 1913.

74. *Ibid.*, Cleave to Harcourt, no date.

75. *Ibid.*, Bishop of Lincoln to Harcourt, 31 May 1913.

76. S.P. XLII (1912), enclosure in Harcourt to McCallum, No. 326, 26 July 1912. Harcourt's reply to deputation. It is interesting to note that the Secretary of State's father, Sir William Harcourt, had been a "strongly convinced Temperance reformer" of the late 19th century. "Apart from Brougham, no prominent politician identified himself with licensing and temperance reform until Sir William Harcourt embraced local option in the 1880's." See Brian Harrison, "Drink and Sobriety in England, 1815-73," *International Review of Social History*, XII, 1967, part 2, p. 216, and Henry Carter, *The English Temperance Movement: a study in objectives*, London, 1933, p. 219.

77. C.O. 54/769, Harcourt's minute, 22 May 1913.

78. C.O. 54/768, Harcourt to Butler, 16 May 1913.

79. *Ibid.*, Harcourt's minute, 23 May 1913.

80. C.O. 54/762, Stubbs to Harcourt, No. 391, 11 June 1913.

Advisory Boards and Local Option

One of the important demands made by the Ceylonese leaders was that the opening of taverns should be subject to local control. A grievance they had with regard to the toddy shops was that they were established without consulting the wishes of the people. The demand for some form of local option was a main theme in the interview granted to the Native Races and Liquor Traffic United Committee by the Secretary of State. The Horsburgh-Thurley Report had recommended against the adoption of local option and Ceylon's unsuitability for it was emphasized by Sir Hugh Clifford who introduced the Bill in the local legislature. Yet, as Sir Herbert Roberts who led the deputation to the Secretary of State pointed out, in the Madras system (the model for the new system for Ceylon) there was provision for advisory boards. The Ceylonese representatives in the deputation strongly urged the adoption of local option and denied that local option was not practicable in Ceylon. Jayatilaka maintained that the people of Ceylon had a regular and settled form of government, under which people enjoyed some local self government, centuries before the arrival of Europeans.⁸¹

The representations made by the deputation evidently impressed the Secretary of State who instructed McCallum that the issue of licences should be placed more directly under the control of public opinion. This was to be done by the establishment of licensing boards in each province or district. The licensing officer (who was the Government Agent) was to be guided by these Boards which were to include representatives of Municipalities, Local Boards, Village Councils, etc.⁸² This was indeed a major concession, especially in the light of the Ceylon government's denial of the possibility of consulting local opinion. It seems that the Secretary of State was influenced in making this decision by a memorandum submitted by Marcus Fernando.⁸³ Lord Emmott, the Under Secretary, thought the memorandum "able and moderate"⁸⁴ and A. E. Collins of the Colonial Office confessed that "there seems to be cogency in his representations,"⁸⁵ even though the Governor had attempted to prejudice Collins by asking him, in a private letter, not to take Fernando's views seriously.⁸⁶ The Colonial Office realised that there was no obvious reason why Fernando should oppose government, for "He is not a prancing patriot."⁸⁷

81. S.P. XLII (1912), enclosure in Harcourt to McCallum, No. 326, 26 July 1912.

82. *Ibid.*, Harcourt to McCallum, No. 326, 26 July 1912.

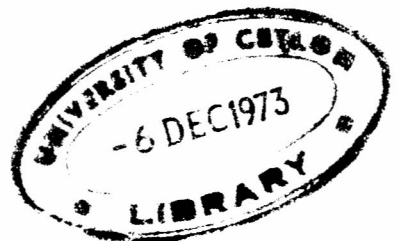
83. C.O. 54/752, memorandum by Marcus Fernando.

84. *Ibid.*, Lord Emmott's minute, 12 July 1912.

85. *Ibid.*, A. E. Collins' minute, 9 July 1912.

86. *Idem.*

87. C.O. 54/758, R. E. Stubbs' minute, 1 July 1912.



The Secretary of State's instructions to establish licensing boards surprised and annoyed the Ceylon government. In what they construed as a struggle with the Ceylonese elite it was necessary for the local administration to feel that they had the power of the Colonial Office behind them. McCallum, therefore, cabled to the Colonial Office that the Secretary of State's instructions could destroy the proposed scheme, as licensing boards with popular representation might well veto the separation of arrack and toddy which was fundamental to the reform. The Governor said that he had no objection to representative boards but insisted that they should only be advisory. The delegation of licensing authority by the government to a non-governmental agency, he argued, was "wholly not suitable for existing local conditions."⁸⁸ J. Robinson⁸⁹ and A. E. Collins⁹⁰ of the Colonial Office tended to agree with the Governor that "the Boards should be advisory only, in the first instance anyhow." But the Secretary of State, with his temperance inclinations, was adamant and minuted, "If the Governor will not meet me on the local option plan I will not assent to the Ordinance."⁹¹ Accordingly, Sir George Fiddes, a senior official of the Colonial Office, drafted a reply to McCallum pressing him to reconsider the matter.⁹²

The reasons for McCallum's objections to licensing boards were elaborated in the despatch that followed his telegram of 20 August.⁹³ The Governor argued that the ultimate power of deciding whether or not to establish taverns must not be given to the Ceylonese because "there is in Ceylon a strong and wealthy body of individuals" who have for many years benefited from the arrack industry and who would try to influence the local licensing committees if they had absolute power. McCallum maintained that these persons have "made a tool of the sincerity of *bona fide* temperance advocates, and have successfully captured a large mass of uninstructed public opinion in this Colony during the recent agitation..." It may at first seem improbable that a renter would want the closing of taverns in his area. The Governor's argument, however, was that since all the arrack sold and consumed in his area was provided by the renter, the abolition of taverns only meant that he could dispose of the liquor illicitly, in places free from "the disadvantages of publicity, and from harrassing supervision and restrictions." The arrack renter was of course opposed to the new toddy taverns as they deprived him of an additional source of revenue.⁹⁴

88. C.O. 54/753, McCallum to Secretary of State (Telegram), 20 August 1912.

89. *Ibid.*, J. Robinson's minute, 22 August 1912.

90. *Ibid.*, A. E. Collins' minute, 22 August 1912.

91. *Ibid.*, Harcourt's minute, 23 August 1912.

92. *Ibid.*, Fiddes' minute, 24 August 1912.

93. *Ibid.*, McCallum to Harcourt, No. 466, 22 August 1912.

94. The Ordinance prohibited arrack renters from having an interest in toddy shops, although in practice this was difficult to enforce.

The Ceylon government was embarrassed by the attitude of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. In a private letter to Sir John Anderson, the Permanent Under Secretary of State, McCallum said:

As regards Excise Reforms it is a calamity that the Secretary of State is so keen on "local option" thus throwing himself into the arms of the enemy—the arrack renters—who know what an important weapon it will be in their hands.⁹⁵

The Governor said that even in the case of advisory committees his Executive Committee acquiesced only very reluctantly; "so rampant is bribery and corruption in the island." McCallum was probably unaware that the Secretary of State's view was shared by others in the Colonial Office, including C. W. Dixon⁹⁶ and Sir John Anderson himself.⁹⁷ The latter confessed that: "The Governor's arguments do not impress me in the least..." The Colonial Office was, however, generous to McCallum for they were aware that "Sir H. Clifford is the real author of this policy, which the Governor defends so stoutly."⁹⁸ Sir Hugh Clifford was due to arrive in England in October and Harcourt decided to postpone the final decision on the matter until he saw Clifford.⁹⁹ Clifford's personal intervention proved decisive. After discussing the matter with Clifford and Anton Bertram, the Attorney General of Ceylon, the Secretary of State agreed that the Boards should have only advisory powers.¹⁰⁰

Having won this major concession from the Colonial Office, the Governor outlined his plan for instituting advisory committees. These Boards were to be appointed annually and were to consist of an equal number of officials and non-officials, with the Chairman having the casting vote.¹⁰¹ In the Colombo municipal area, for example, the officials were to be the Government Agent (Chairman), Chairman of the Municipal Council, and the Superintendent of Police. One non-official was to be nominated by the chairman, another by the Colombo Municipal Council, and the third by the Governor from among the Justices of Peace. They were to advise on the establishment, supervision and transfer of taverns, but the question of sites was specifically excluded from their jurisdiction. These proposals failed to please the Colonial Office. Anderson was in favour of an unofficial majority in the committee, "to allow scope for a better or more representative expression of public opinion."¹⁰² The Secre-

95. C.O. 54/753, McCallum to Anderson (private letter), 29 August 1912.

96. *Ibid.*, C. W. Dixon's minute, 14 Sept. 1912.

97. *Ibid.*, Anderson's minute, 18 Sept. 1912.

98. *Ibid.*, A. E. Collins' minute, 17 Sept. 1912. Clifford was the Colonial Secretary of Ceylon.

99. C.O. 54/753, Harcourt's minute, 23 Sept. 1912.

100. *S.P.* XLII (1912), Harcourt to McCallum, 25 Oct. 1912.

101. C.O. 54/756, McCallum to Harcourt, No. 744, 12 Dec. 1912.

102. *Ibid.*, Anderson's minute, 4 Jan. 1913.

tary of State too wanted an unofficial majority and he went further in suggesting that the chairman should not have a casting vote.¹⁰³ Besides, Harcourt felt that there was no reason why the committees should not be allowed to advise on the question of sites. The Ceylon government, realising the mood of the Colonial Office, conceded the principle of an unofficial majority, by including one additional non-official nominated by the Governor.¹⁰⁴ The casting vote of the chairman was also revoked, but the Ceylon government persisted on the question of sites, arguing that it was impracticable for a committee to advise on specific sites for taverns. But Anderson and the Secretary of State¹⁰⁵ were both insistent that the jurisdiction of the committee should not be so curtailed, and the Ceylon government had to concede this too.¹⁰⁶

In their actual operation, the advisory committees functioned in harmony with the government despite the unofficial majority. In 1913-14, for example, out of a total of 252 excise decisions made by Government Agents throughout Ceylon, only 53 were made contrary to the wishes of Advisory Boards.¹⁰⁷ This cooperation between government and advisory committees was a result of the composition of the committees, since all non-officials were nominated by the Governor.¹⁰⁸ Thus Ceylonese leaders soon began to ask for elected non-officials instead. It was only in 1918, however, that the election of unofficial members was permitted.¹⁰⁹

There was a more serious grievance with regard to these committees. The Buddhists who formed the large majority of the population¹¹⁰ and were the chief critics of government's policy, were conspicuously under-represented on these Boards. In 1914, for example, in 28 out of 32 committees in Sinhalese districts, there were no nominated unofficial Buddhists. In 24 committees there were no Buddhists at all, official or non-official.¹¹¹ In 1915, 43 committees were appointed, including only 18 Buddhists out of a total of 149 non-officials nominated by the Governor.¹¹² The result was that these Boards became "a huge farce."¹¹³ As Jayatilaka pointed out, "the conclusion is irresistible that the Buddhists have been deliberately excluded from these Boards."¹¹⁴

103. *Ibid.*, Harcourt's minute, 5 Jan. 1913.

104. C.O. 54/760, R. E. Stubbs to Harcourt, Confidential, 5 Feb. 1913.

105. C.O. 54/760, Harcourt's minute, 27 Feb. 1913.

106. C.O. 54/761, Stubbs to Harcourt, Confidential, 9 April 1913.

107. S.P. XV (1914), *Excise Advisory Committees: Return to an Order of the Legislative Council of Ceylon, dated 15 July 1914.*

108. C.O. 54/769, Herbert Roberts to Harcourt, 15 March 1913.

109. *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 29 July 1918.

110. At the 1911 Census, Buddhists formed 69.3% of the population.

111. C.O. 54/790, John Newton to Harcourt, 21 May 1915.

112. C.O. 54/785, Chalmers to Bonar Law, Confidential, 4 Nov. 1915.

113. *Ceylonese*, 24 Jan. 1915, speech by W. A. de Silva at a meeting of the Colombo Total Abstinence Central Union.

114. D. B. Jayatilaka, *The Buddhist Temperance Movement, op. cit.*, p. 7.

The composition of the Advisory Boards was criticised in Britain by the Native Races and Liquor Traffic United Committee. A deputation of the United Committee met the Secretary of State¹¹⁵ and the Colonial Office had to seek information from the Ceylon authorities. The Ceylon government in reply denied deliberate discrimination, and explained the paucity of Buddhists as showing that there were few Buddhists of sufficient standing to be recognised as representatives of the people.¹¹⁶ The absurdity of this explanation did not go unnoticed in the Colonial Office,¹¹⁷ but they were not prepared to question the *bona fides* of the local government.

Loss of faith in these advisory committees had an important consequence. It redirected the energies of the Ceylonese elite towards an uncompromising demand for local option. The Ceylonese temperance leaders were never enthusiastic about Advisory Boards, for they always wanted a direct voice in excise matters. The demand for local option was therefore a central theme of the early temperance agitation.¹¹⁸ The government, in response to widespread dissatisfaction, appointed a Commission in 1916 to consider "the arrangements for the manufacture and sale of spirits in Ceylon."¹¹⁹ The Commission included two Ceylonese, W. A. de Silva and A. Kanagasabai, both active temperance workers. This Commission made the important recommendation that if 75% of the road tax payers of an area served by a tavern were opposed to it, the tavern should be abolished. This recommendation was accepted by the government, and the principle of local option was thus introduced. The privilege was first confined to foreign liquor, but was extended to arrack in 1918,¹²⁰ and in the next year to toddy as well.¹²¹

The Government's acceptance of the principle of local option was a major victory for the western educated elite who had organized and led the temperance agitation. It was also an impetus to further temperance activity, for it was now clearly the responsibility of temperance workers to prove that their demand for local option was justifiable. As the Rev. W. J. Noble pointed out:

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115. C.O. 54/777, Proceedings of a deputation of the United Committee to the Secretary of State on 21 July 1914.
116. C.O. 54/783, Chalmers to Bonar Law, Confidential, 22 July 1915.
117. *Ibid.*, J. Robinson's minute, 19 Aug. 1915.
118. For example, *Ceylon Independent*, 31 Jan. 1913, Presidential Address of W. A. de Silva to the Convention of Temperance Workers; *Ceylonese*, 25 April 1915, Report of the Hapitigam Korale Total Abstinence Union for 1913-15; *ibid.*, 11 Jan. 1914, Half-yearly Convention of Buddhist Temperance Societies.
119. S.P. IX (1917), *Report of the Commission appointed to consider the arrangements for the manufacture and sale of spirits in Ceylon*.
120. *Report of the Excise Commissioner, 1918*.
121. *Report of the Excise Commissioner, 1919*.

"Many of us have claimed for years that the overwhelming majority of the people of Ceylon are opposed to the existence of all facilities for obtaining liquor. Now is the time to prove the truth of the claim."¹²²

The energies of temperance societies were thereafter concentrated on rallying mass support to make local option a success. The Colombo Total Abstinence Central Union, for example, sent members to hold meetings in different areas in preparation for local option polls.¹²³ The task of educating the people in this responsibility was a hard one. "It means that the whole male population of a village had to turn out walk for miles, remain there patiently till their turn came, deliver their vote through formalities to which they were strangers, and win through an experience of which they had no previous conception."¹²⁴ The temperance leaders were fully conscious of the implications of the concession granted by the government and of their own role in obtaining it. Thus, Jayatilaka, addressing a convention of temperance workers, declared: "This is a priceless boon, but it must not be considered as an unexpected and unmerited gift from above. It is the fruit of our persistent labours for several years."¹²⁵ He emphasized that local option was the weapon with which the temperance workers could achieve their goal. "If this right is properly exercised we shall be able in a few years to get rid of the drink evil from this island."¹²⁶

The requirement of having to obtain the support of 75% of all the road-tax payers in an area was a difficult one and the temperance leaders soon began to complain against it. The Colombo Total Abstinence Union, for example, wanted the condition relaxed to 75% of those who voted, provided that not less than half the total number entitled to vote arrived at the poll.¹²⁷ Ramanathan appealed in the Legislative Council for this stringent requirement to be modified, but he met with no success.¹²⁸ In 1921, however, the government granted many important concessions to the temperance workers. The required poll was reduced from 75% to 60%. Permission was given to hold ballots to close all taverns in an area simultaneously, instead of having separate polls for separate taverns. And the cost of duplicate road-tax receipts was reduced from 50 cents to 15 cents.¹²⁹ These concessions were so important that the Excise Commissioner claimed that "1921 has been an *annus mirabilis* for the temperance reformer."

122. *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 9 March, letter by the Rev. W. J. Noble.

123. *Ibid.*, 8 July 1918. Also, Half-yearly Report of the Society, in *Daily News*, 27 Jan. 1919.

124. *Daily News*, 28 July 1915. Speech of D. S. Senanayake at half yearly convention of Colombo Central Union.

125. *Ibid.*, 7 Feb. 1920, D. B. Jayatilaka's presidential address.

126. *Idem.*

127. *Ceylon Daily News*, 27 Jan. 1919, Half yearly convention of the Colombo Total Abstinence Central Union.

128. *Ceylon Hansard*, 1918, 10 July 1918.

129. *Report of the Excise Commissioner*, 1921.

In 1925 further concessions were granted. For Colombo, the support of 51% of voters in the electoral list was considered sufficient for closure of taverns. And hotel public bars were also included within the jurisdiction of local option ballots.¹³⁰ Thus, in little more than a decade the government had conceded many of the demands of temperance leaders, even if only in instalments.

The Organization of Temperance Societies and their Activities

The Buddhist temperance societies throughout the island were controlled by the Total Abstinence Central Union of Colombo. This Central Union was formed in July 1912 as a coordinating society, to which provincial societies could be affiliated;¹³¹ its main object was to give leadership to the Temperance Movement.¹³² The Central Union had about a score of active members who met once a week for such matters as organizing new societies and arranging propaganda meetings.¹³³ At the village level there were societies which met at least once a month. When several societies were established in a locality they were placed under a District Union, composed mainly of office-bearers of affiliated village societies. Many such Unions were established, the most well known being the Hapitigam Korale Union. Once every three months representatives of the Central Union and the District Unions met in conference to discuss organizational matters. And bi-annual conventions were held in Colombo, attended by delegates of all societies affiliated to the Central Union. The total membership of temperance societies in the early years was about 50,000.¹³⁴

In September 1916 a Federated Council of temperance workers was established to "secure the cooperation of all societies, whether Christians, Buddhists, Hindu, Mohammedan or Non-Sectarian in the promotion of this common object."¹³⁵ The Federated Council organized the World's Temperance Week celebrations with an annual rally and held quarterly meetings of temperance workers of all denominations and creeds.

The enthusiasm of temperance societies was conspicuous in the initial phase. In November 1912, for example, a meeting of the Hapitigam Korale Union was attended by some 25,000 persons.¹³⁶ Another mass

130. *Report of the Excise Commissioner, 1925.*

131. *Ceylon Independent*, 29 July 1912.

132. Among its original members were W. A. de Silva, F. R. Senanayake, C. Batuwantudawe, Edmund Hewavitarana, Arthur V. Dias, Martinus C. Perera and W. Harischandra.

133. D. B. Jayatilaka, *The Buddhist Temperance Movement, op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

134. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

135. *Souvenir: Women's Christian Temperance Union, Colombo, 1952*, p. 5.

136. *Ceylon Independent*, 20 Nov. 1912. Among those who addressed this meeting were some of the most prominent Ceylonese of the day, including P. Ramanathan, Dr. Marcus Fernando, W. A. de Silva, C. Batuwantudawe, F. R. Senanayake, H. A. P. Sandrasegara, D. S. Senanayake, Arthur V. Dias, and D. R. Wijewardene.

meeting of the same Union drew an attendance of over 30,000.¹³⁷ This Temperance Union deserves special mention as it was easily the most successful of the temperance organisations in Ceylon. Founded on 18 August 1912 under the presidency of Don Spater Senanayake, it was guided and financed by the Senanayake family, the dominant elite family of the locality. On the death of the father, the eldest son D. C. Senanayake became president of the Union and his brothers F. R. and D. S. Senanayake were active members of it. By April 1915 the Union was able to claim 9000 members with 50 affiliated societies.¹³⁸ Subsequently, this Union also had the distinction of organizing the most successful local option campaign, leading to the closure of all the taverns in the areas.¹³⁹

At the first convention of the Total Abstinence Central Union held in January 1913, delegates of over 60 district societies were represented.¹⁴⁰ By 1915 the Central Union was able to claim a membership of nearly 50,000.¹⁴¹ The growing strength of temperance societies saw a reversal after the riots which occurred in May-June 1915.¹⁴² The government had been alarmed by the temperance agitation and was inclined to attribute political motives to it. It was natural, therefore, for government to suspect some connection between the temperance campaign and the riots. Whether temperance societies were "seditious," as government claimed they were, would depend on how broad an interpretation one gives to this term. There is no doubt that sentiments critical of the government were expressed at these meetings,¹⁴³ which, after all, were organized to oppose government's excise policy. At a protest meeting in Colombo in 1912, a speaker who said "let us have Ceylon for the Ceylonese" was greeted with applause,¹⁴⁴ and the government may have interpreted such remarks as being seditious. It is also true that the temperance leaders themselves visualised the temperance organisation as being a possible basis on which a nation wide political movement could be initiated. For instance, C. A. Hewavitarana in his presidential address to the Central Union in January 1915, only four months before the riots, declared: "It is becoming evident that our Temperance Convention will in the near future become our National Convention and we should all work with that object in view."¹⁴⁵ Such

137. *Ceylonese*, 31 Aug. 1913.

138. *Ceylonese*, 25 April 1915.

139. *Daily News*, 20 Jan. 1921. This Union covered the Negombo District of the Western Province.

140. *Ceylon Independent*, 30 Jan. 1913.

141. *Ceylonese*, 26 Jan. 1915.

142. See Tissa Fernando, "The Post Riots Campaign for Justice," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, XXIX, 2, 1970.

143. C.O. 54/783, Chalmers to Bonar Law, Confidential, 22 July 1915. See enclosure I, Report of the Inspector General of Police, 8 July 1915.

144. *Ceylon Independent*, 17 June 1912, speech by the Rev. F. D. Ederisinghe.

145. *Ceylonese*, 24 Jan. 1915.

speeches may have alarmed government and it is significant that the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Steel-Maitland, in the debate on the Colonial Office Vote, referred to the above remark as an example of the political use of temperance societies.¹⁴⁶ Yet there is no evidence that the temperance leaders were responsible for organizing the riots or that they were plotting to overthrow the British *raj*. This was acknowledged by Governor Anderson after examining the police files on the arrested Ceylonese leaders.¹⁴⁷

The Government had been uneasy about the growing strength of the westernized elite and their emergence as national leaders after their participation in the temperance campaign. When the riots occurred it was a good opportunity for retaliatory action. Many temperance leaders were imprisoned without trial for varying periods and the Education Code was amended to authorise withholding of grant-in-aid payments to schools whose owners, managers or teachers were involved in temperance activity.¹⁴⁸

These actions proved disastrous for the temperance movement. It was widely believed throughout the country that the government was opposed to temperance work and that people could indulge in temperance activity only at the risk of incurring official displeasure. "The mere indication that the local official is against a movement is often enough to kill it in a country like this, where few people care to offend the ruling body."¹⁴⁹ The consequences were serious. At the half-yearly convention of the Central Union in December 1915, the secretary called attention to "the spirit of inertia and inactivity now prevalent in most of our affiliated societies." In May 1916, at a conference of temperance workers it was reported that "in most districts temperance work was to-day in a deplorably somnolent condition."¹⁵⁰ Jayatilaka observed in 1917 that "one hears now but rarely of a village temperance gathering, whereas in pre-riot days perhaps a dozen meetings were held every day."¹⁵¹ The decline of temperance work was reflected in the Colombo Central Union too, and in 1917 it could claim no more than sixty active members in all its affiliated societies.¹⁵² In 1917, "some effort was made to revive the village societies but did not meet with quick satisfactory results."¹⁵³ Reviving interest in temperance work was difficult so long as government was thought to be

146. *H. C. Deb.*, 5th series, LXXXIV, 3 Aug. 1916.

147. C.O. 54/804, Anderson to Secretary of State, Telegram, 9 April 1917.

148. See Tissa Fernando, *Journal of Asian Studies*, *op. cit.*

149. *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 22 Nov. 1916, editorial.

150. *Ibid.*, 7 Dec. 1915.

151. *Ibid.*, 3 May 1916.

152. D. B. Jayatilaka, *The Buddhist Temperance Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

153. *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 9 July 1917.

154. *Ibid.*, 29 Jan. 1918. Proceedings to half-yearly convention of Colombo Central Union.

against the movement. It was the granting of local option which acted as a stimulus for renewed activity, for it was a recognition that government was at last prepared to abide by the wishes of the people. With the granting of local option the relations between temperance leaders and the government improved, and D. S. Senanayake was able to say in 1919 that "the government, if not yet with us, is not against us."

The activities of temperance societies took many forms. At a meeting of the Central Union in 1915, it was decided to initiate work beneficial to different localities, in addition to the usual temperance propaganda.¹⁵⁶ The recommended activities included,

- (a) establishing a Savings Bank for members,
- (b) encouraging home gardening by awarding periodical prizes,
- (c) encouraging cooperative planting enterprise among members,
- (d) promoting trade by established limited liability companies with shares of small value,
- (e) establishing market places for sale of village produce,
- (f) holding exhibitions of planting and industrial products.

Most of these activities were never put into practice. Yet the list shows that the temperance leaders were clearly concerned with the broader social and economic problems facing the village population. C. A. Hewavitarana declared in his presidential address to the Colombo Union,

We have been realizing that mere abstinence is not sufficient, but that a channel should be found for the proper direction of the energies of our village population. Our programme of work therefore is beginning to extend more and more towards social and economic problems.¹⁵⁷

The day to day activities of societies, however, were far less idealistic and tended to be merely temperance propaganda. Distribution of booklets and leaflets on temperance, organizing regular sermons by Buddhist monks on the evil of drink were typical of the work of village societies. The principal work of the Central Union was "helping to establish societies at different centres and sending representatives to lecture at the village centres."¹⁵⁸ Thus, in the second half of 1915 "37 members....visited 76 villages and delivered 188 speeches."¹⁵⁹ A Sinhalese temperance periodical, *Total Abstainer*, was published for free distribution, and by 1918, 28,000

155. *Ceylon Daily News*, 28 July 1919.

156. D. B. Jayatilaka, *The Buddhist Temperance Movement, op. cit.*, p. 15.

157. *Ceylonese*, 24 Jan. 1915.

158. *Ibid.*, 26 Jan. 1915. Report of the Secretary, Central Union.

159. *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 7 Dec. 1915.

copies had been distributed.¹⁶⁰ Every opportunity was utilised by temperance societies to dramatize their strength through mass rallies and processions. The distribution of leaflets and pamphlets was a regular activity at these rallies.¹⁶¹ Resolutions were also passed regularly at the half-yearly conventions and these were communicated to government. With the granting of local option, temperance societies channelled their energies into the organisation of public opinion to ensure the heavy polling necessary for a successful ballot.

One important aspect of the temperance movement was its Buddhist bias and the consequent opportunity for some Buddhist leaders to emerge as national leaders. As Jayatilaka remarked, "the movement has been from the beginning mainly Buddhist. It has been the conscious endeavour of leaders to give it this religious turn."¹⁶² This is understandable for the large majority of Sinhalese were Buddhists and a fundamental teaching of Buddhism is total abstinence from intoxicating drinks and drugs. The relative indifference of the Christian churches in Ceylon to this crusade was a perennial complaint of temperance workers; it was widely accepted that "the Anglican Ministers and Roman Catholic priests are not paying that attention which is expected of them."¹⁶³ The apathy of the Christian churches was a source of embarrassment to individual Christian missionaries sympathetic to the temperance cause.¹⁶⁴ Christian cooperation, however, was not completely lacking and some Christian organizations, notably the Women's Christian Temperance Union played a leading role in the campaign.¹⁶⁵ The Federated Council of Temperance Workers also had many Christian representatives. The Christian influence was also felt indirectly through temperance work in other countries which provided useful propaganda for local temperance workers. Thus, temperance activity in the United States was often cited as worthy of emulation.¹⁶⁶ A source of even greater inspiration proved to be the visits to Ceylon of a number of prominent Christian temperance workers. These included Sarah Nolan, the delegate from Australia to the World Convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union,¹⁶⁷ Flora Strout, Women's Chris-

160. *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 29 Jan. 1918.

161. *Ibid.*, 20 Sept. 1917, Annual Report of the Federated Council of Temperance Workers.

162. D. B. Jayatilaka, *The Buddhist Temperance Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

163. *Ceylon Independent*, 18 Sept. 1913, Letter by George E. de Silva.

164. See comments of the Rev. W. J. Noble in the *Daily News*, 6 Feb. 1920.

165. *Souvenir: Women's Christian Temperance Union*, Colombo, 1952.

166. *Ceylon Daily News*, 7 Feb. 1920, D. B. Jayatilaka's presidential address at convention of Central Union.

Ibid., 21 July 1920, Letter by J. Simon de Silva.

Ibid., 1 Aug. 1921, P. de S. Kularatne's presidential address at convention of Central Union.

167. *Times of Ceylon*, 19 January 1911. She delivered two lectures in Colombo, on "Total Abstinence."

tian Temperance Union World Missionary,¹⁶⁸ and the well-known American temperance personality, W. E. "Pussyfoot" Johnson.¹⁶⁹

Some Reflections on the Temperance Campaign

A comprehensive evaluation of the working of the Excise Ordinance and of the achievements of the temperance campaign are beyond the scope of this paper. It is of some interest, nevertheless, to examine briefly the results of the movement, to see what and how much the Ceylonese leaders were able to achieve by their efforts. How successful was the temperance campaign? The answer to this would depend on what criteria we adopt to evaluate success. If reduction in the number of taverns is the criterion, it was clearly a successful movement, as the following table reveals.

Number of Taverns

Year	Arrack	Toddy
1912	844	1,165
1913	832	989
1915	780	810
1917	738	787
1919	566	667
1921	452	474
1923	321	330
1925	272	281
1927	225	221
1929	139	143
1931	130	148

Source: *Administration Reports of the Excise Commissioner.*

A large number of these reductions were achieved by successful local option ballots as is seen by the marked reduction in taverns after 1919-20, when local option was granted for arrack and toddy.

The reduction of taverns, however, is not synonymous with the growth of temperance and it is necessary to consider whether the temperance campaign led to a fall in the consumption of liquor. The consumption of arrack appears to have fallen with the closing of taverns, as is seen in the following table.

168. *Souvenir: Women's Christian Temperance Union, op. cit.*, p. 6.

169. *Ceylon Daily News*, 10 November 1921. It is interesting to note that Johnson on being interviewed in London on his return from Ceylon prophesied that Ceylon would go 'dry' in two years. *Ibid.*, 29 December 1921. Johnson appears to have even told American audiences that he had introduced 'Prohibition' to Ceylon. See Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess*, London, 1962, p. 477, fn. no. 5.

Consumption of Arrack and Toddy (by gallons)

Year	Arrack	Toddy
1917	1,144,132	4,489,427
1919	1,029,269	4,570,395
1921	848,376	4,443,800
1923	726,172	4,143,801
1925	772,067	4,736,440
1927	752,031	4,501,608
1929	612,761	4,219,989

Source: *Administration Reports of the Excise Commissioner.*

The consumption of arrack was 1,551,544 gallons in 1913 and thus, in 16 years, consumption, according to official statistics, had been reduced to nearly a third. This was in proportion to the reduction in the number of arrack taverns. The consumption of toddy,¹⁷⁰ however, remained steady despite a large reduction in the number of taverns. These figures may suggest that although the temperance campaign had little effect on toddy it did affect the sale of arrack. If this means that a number of arrack drinkers had been weaned to toddy, the credit must go not merely to the temperance workers but to government as well. For it would clearly vindicate government's policy of having separate toddy shops to wean people from arrack to the "less potent and less harmful liquor,"¹⁷¹ toddy.

The interpretation of these figures, however, becomes less simple because of the prevalence of vast illicit traffic in both arrack and toddy. Thus, although there was a marked drop in consumption of arrack according to official statistics, it was generally accepted that there was a corresponding increase in illicit sales. In practically every annual report of the Excise Commissioner during this period, the complaint is made that the closing of taverns had only led to an increase in illicit selling. There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of this observation as it is supported by many non-official sources as well.¹⁷² The temperance leaders themselves conceded the existence of an illicit traffic. In his presidential address to the Central Union in 1920, D. B. Jayatilaka said: "Let us not delude ourselves with the belief that the abolition of a tavern must necessarily mean the abolition of the drink evil. There is reason to think that illicit liquor traffic is widely prevalent."¹⁷³ On another occasion, Jayatilaka confessed that "sometimes the very men who recorded their votes against a tavern in a particular area joined in the manufacture and illicit sale of

170. Consumption figure for 1913 was 3,104,775 gallons.

171. *S.P.* XLII (1912), McCallum to Harcourt, No. 333, 13 June 1912.

172. *Ceylon Independent*, 7 November 1923, letter by J. M. Benjamin. Also see 7 September 1923 and 5 December 1925, editorials.

173. *Daily News*, 7 February 1920.

arrack.¹⁷⁴ The existence of illicit sales makes the drop in consumption of arrack in the official statistics illusory. Even if we accept the drop in consumption of arrack as genuine, there was a marked increase in the consumption of equally potent foreign liquors. The consumption of whisky, brandy and gin, for example, increased from 66,659 gallons in 1918 to 150,415 in 1923 and 303,774 gallons in 1926. That this sharp rise in the consumption of foreign liquor was not a coincidence was recognized by temperance leaders themselves.¹⁷⁵ The evidence therefore, seems to favour the observation of the Excise Commissioner that in most districts the closing of taverns only served to "multiply illicit traffic and divert consumers from one sort of drink to another."¹⁷⁶

Even if its success with regard to the consumption of alcohol was limited, the temperance campaign was functional in providing the Ceylonese elite with an intensive training in leadership. It was to them a stepping-stone to national politics and it is significant that many of the distinguished Ceylonese politicians of the post-1920 era came to prominence through the temperance movement.¹⁷⁷ The immediate motivation for the movement was, of course, the Excise Ordinance, but one could surmise that this alone was unlikely to have succeeded in rallying middle class Ceylonese to such concerted action. The fact was that, deprived of any political responsibility and denied satisfactory employment in the country, there were many well educated Ceylonese who were in need of a sense of participation in national affairs. Their lack of power and influence caused frustration and discontent among wealthy, professional and western educated Ceylonese. A Ceylonese-owned newspaper wrote in 1913,

every man who goes abroad for his education comes back here humiliated to find that in his own home he is the subject of a despotic administration. He is barely tolerated. His opinion is worth nothing. He has no voice in guiding the affairs of his country.¹⁷⁸

174. *Ibid.*, 1 August 1920. A prominent Tamil Legislative Councillor was "discovered to be importing drink into a 'dry' area in his car." P. R. Smythe, *A Ceylon Commentary*, London, 1932, p. 61.

175. See, for example, *Ceylon Independent*, 29 April 1925, letter by S. Rajaratnam. The case of Jaffna District demonstrates well that reduction in the number of taverns need not necessarily mean a decrease in the consumption of arrack. In 1913 when there were 35 taverns in Jaffna, 38,373 gallons of arrack were consumed. In 1926 when the number of taverns had been reduced to 6, the consumption had increased to 44,078 gallons. In 1927 when all the taverns in Jaffna were closed by local option, there was a sharp rise in the consumption figures of neighbouring districts. The consumption of arrack in Mannar and Mullaitivu rose from 20,650 gallons in 1925 to 39,270 gallons in 1927. The evidence suggests that arrack was smuggled into 'dry' Jaffna. For instance, railway tickets issued from Mankulam station to Jaffna for the three months October to December rose from 256 in 1925 to 1,961 in 1927. See Reports of the Excise Commissioner.

176. *Report of the Excise Commissioner*, 1921.

177. For example, W. A. de Silva, D. B. Jayatilaka, D. S. Senanayake, W. Duraiswamy and S. Rajaratnam were Members of the Legislative Council under the 1924 Constitution. D. S. Senanayake, C. Batuwantudawe, W. A. de Silva, George E. de Silva and D. B. Jayatilaka were Ministers under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931.

178. *Ceylon Independent*, 19 April 1913, editorial

It is significant that many of the temperance leaders were educated in England and a number of them had excellent degrees from Oxford, Cambridge or London. They were not anti-British. A Ceylonese newspaper claimed: "There is no desire here to break away from Great Britain. There is not a breath of disloyalty anywhere."¹⁷⁹ The educated Ceylonese aspirations in the first two decades of this century were mainly for greater participation in the affairs of the nation. Refused recognition as partners by the government, they had no choice but to turn to the masses for psychological sustenance. The temperance question provided the opportunity. Alienated from the people themselves by their foreign language and dress,¹⁸⁰ the westernized elite needed to dramatize their rejection of at least some western values if they were to be accepted as popular leaders. It is interesting, therefore, that they always referred to the consumption of alcohol as an evil introduced by western rule and repugnant to indigenous culture. Typical was the remark of P. Arunachalam: "In ancient times only degraded persons and the lowest castes used intoxicating liquor. After the Europeans came here drinking has become fashionable and spread far and wide."¹⁸¹ Indeed, westernization implied the acceptance of alcohol as a social beverage, and liquor had gradually become an integral part of Ceylonese urban culture. "It is fashionable to drink and to offer drinks, to serve intoxicants at public dinners, at private gatherings, at weddings and at funerals."¹⁸²

The popular argument of temperance leaders was that liquor was enjoyed only by the westernized urban element and that the majority of villagers who were Buddhists, looked on alcohol with abhorrence. Jayatilaka, for example, referred to Ceylon as "the home of Buddhism" and emphasised that "Buddhism condemns as a low, vicious, and unrighteous occupation the manufacture and sale of any kind of intoxicating drink or drug."¹⁸³ Since Buddhism discouraged the use of intoxicants it was assumed that Buddhist villagers were opposed to drink and were in favour of the ultimate goal of total prohibition espoused by temperance societies.¹⁸⁴ This assumption was questionable. As early as 1912, Harcourt in reply to a question in the House of Commons expressed his regret that, although

179. *Idem.*

180. "The country's independence was achieved by a group of leaders whose most outstanding characteristic was their extreme degree of western sophistication. In the colonial period, the Sinhalese upper middle class was more westernized than any other Asian group outside the Philippines. It was quite cut off from the masses," Francis Carnell, "South Asian Nationalism and the West," *St. Antony's Papers*, No. 7, 1960.

181. *Ceylonese*, 25 April 1915. Also see D. B. Jayatilaka's remarks in *The Buddhist Temperance Movement*, 1916, p. 3.

182. *Ceylonese*, 2 June 1914, editorial.

183. *S.P.* XLII (1912), *The Ceylon Excise System*, enclosure in Harcourt to McCallum, No. 326, 26 July 1912. Statement by D. B. Jayatilaka.

184. *Daily News*, 28 July 1919. See, for example, D. S. Senanayake's presidential address to the Central Union.

the use of alcohol was contrary to the tenets of Buddhism, the Sinhalese consumed large quantities of it.¹⁸⁵ The consumption figures for alcohol and the large illicit traffic were ample testimony to the truth of this assertion. It seems to be clear that there was not in Ceylon overwhelming opinion in favour of total abstinence; for if there was, abstinence would have come without the need for legislation.

It was also significant that after the constitutional reforms of 1921-1924 which gave Ceylonese greater representation in the Legislative Council, elite participation in temperance activity diminished. One reason for this, no doubt, was that many of the temperance demands had been met by the mid '20s. But equally important was the fact that some of the more influential temperance leaders had been elected or nominated to the legislature and their ambitions were thus greatly satisfied. By being given a greater share in the government of the country many temperance leaders had achieved a sense of participation in national affairs. The western educated elite had gained a major break-through in national politics and their enthusiasm was deflected away from the temperance cause. It would obviously be wrong to think that no sooner were they elected to the Legislative Council then the temperance leaders abandoned their cause. What was true, however, was that their views became conspicuously moderate. They were, for example, now less insistent about enforcing "total prohibition," which had all along been the ultimate goal of the temperance movement.¹⁸⁶ Even the strong advocate of prohibition in the Legislative Council, S. Rajaratnam, became reconciled to enforcing prohibition "in about 35 years."¹⁸⁷

It is true that the nationalist movement of Ceylon was never a mass movement in the Indian sense. However, for the effective leadership of a nationalist agitation some degree of mass support is necessary. Two events in the early 20th century helped the western educated middle class to attain unprecedented rapport with the masses. The first was the temperance movement, which was closely followed by the 'campaign for justice' after the 1915 riots. The temperance movement is important not merely for bringing the elite and the masses together in a common cause, but also for providing the elite with an opportunity to get acquainted with the methods of constitutional agitation. This experience was to prove invaluable in the decades that followed when the elite launched a well organized political campaign which depended entirely on constitutional means.

185. *H. C. Deb.*, 5th series, Vol. XLII, 16 Oct. 1912. Also see speech of acting Colonial Secretary, S. A. Pagdon, in reply to Ramanathan in the Legislative Council, *Ceylon Hansard*, 1918, 10 July 1918.

186. See, for example, proceedings of temperance meetings in *Morning Leader*, 7 Aug. 1917, 15 Jan. 1917, 29 July 1918; *Daily News*, 8 Sept. 1918, 29 July 1919.

187. *Ceylon Independent*, 29 April 1914.