

The 1848 'Rebellion' in Ceylon: The British Parliamentary Post-Mortem; Part I*

K. M. DE SILVA

For over two years from the beginning of 1849 the affairs of the crown colony of Ceylon -- the "rebellion" of 1848,¹ its suppression, and its aftermath--remained very much a matter of interest and controversy in Parliament in Britain. Never before and certainly never after did the island's affairs attract the attention of Parliament to this degree.

This present essay is a study of the work of the Select Committee which was appointed in February 1849 to probe the administration of the Crown Colonies of British Guiana and Ceylon, and which very soon after the commencement of its activities came to concentrate its attention on Ceylon alone. The essay has two main but inter-connected purposes: to review in depth, through a detailed examination of the relevant parliamentary debates, and the ebb and flow of argument, a mid-nineteenth century Parliamentary Select Committee at work, as a case-study of the legislature's attempt to influence the processes of colonial administration; and to study the response of the island's own government to this process of parliamentary investigation of its activities.

The parliamentary interest in Ceylon at this time was by no means a reflection of any particular importance attached to the island for its own sake, or colonial affairs in general. It was largely a matter of tactics and manoeuvre of an essentially opportunistic nature within the context of extraordinary fluidity in party politics in Britain. For this reason the present essay needs to be introduced by a brief review of the state of party politics in Britain in the 1840's.

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1. The Ceylon 'rebellion' of 1848 is one of the neglected topics of the island's recent history. The only substantial work dealing with it was published in 1868, during the controversy over Governor Eyre and his administration in Jamaica. This was R. Henderson's *A History of the Rebellion in Ceylon during Lord Torrington's Government* (London, 1868). Apart from this we have merely a few contemporary pamphlets of uneven quality, and a chapter in L. A. Mills's *Ceylon Under British Rule* (O.U.P., 1933). In W. P. Maxwell's *British Colonial Policy in the Age of Peel and Russell* (O.U.P., 1930) the Ceylon rebellion was relegated to the appendix. The third Earl Grey's *The Colonial Policy of Lord John Russell's Administration* (2 volumes, London, 1853), a contemporary work of substantial value, however, gave it a prominence which it richly deserved.

See also the introduction (pp. 1-31) in K. M. de Silva, ed. *Letters on Ceylon, 1846-50. The Administration of Viscount Torrington and the 'Rebellion' of 1848* (Colombo and Kandy, 1965).

The exceptional fluidity in British party politics began in the middle of 1845 when Peel's Conservative administration began to fall apart over the Corn Laws crisis. The formidable Conservative Party was deeply divided on this issue, and the passage of the repeal of the Corn Laws through Parliament inevitably accentuated its division. The Whigs' resumption of office in 1846 under Lord John Russell after the defeat of Peel's administration was merely the substitution of a weak government for a strong one.²

The general election of 1847 did not give the Whigs under Lord John Russell the fresh start he would have liked. In the new House of Commons the Liberals just outnumbered the two factions into which the Conservatives were now divided, the Protectionists and the Peelites, while the Radicals had increased their strength and this latter development brought in a large number of ideologically committed members at the expense of men who would have given uncompromising support to a Liberal government.³

The events of 1845-6 had given the Liberal party an advantage, which skilfully exploited might have ensured its preponderance in the country for years to come. One means of ensuring this was the reconstruction of an administration on a broader basis than the conventional Whig, by incorporating the Peelites and the Free Trade Radicals in the Russell administration and constituting thereby a "government fairly representing the industrial mind and conservative progress of the country."⁴ But the major error of the new Ministry was that it left Russell with a cabinet which was "ostentatiously representative of Whiggery's political *elite*" and "the last to be formed on a designedly Whig basis."⁵ Russell was not insensitive to the need for a more broadbased administration, but the only non-Whig politicians whom he made serious and repeated efforts to bring into the higher reaches of the administration were the Peelites. A Whig-Peelite coalition required mutual consent but this was not forthcoming from the Peelites, even though Peel pursuing his principle of a "Conservative opposition" propped up Russell's weak and indecisive government for four years.

The Russell ministry may have stabilised its position if it exercised its option of a shift to the left to accommodate the Radicals. Three men with some sort of Radical past were appointed Junior Ministers, Benjamin Hawes (to the Colonial Office), Henry Ward and Milner Gibson. But the Whig grandees were firmly opposed to admitting a Radical, and especially a man of the calibre of Cobden, to the Cabinet. The Prime Minister made no serious attempt to consider the advantages of an opening to the left.

2. N. Gash, *Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852* (O.U.P., 1965); D. Southgate, *The Passing of the Whigs* (London, 1966); *Most English Minister* (London, 1967).

3. Tufnel, the Liberal Whip, estimated a total Liberal strength of 336 of whom 40 were doubtful, though half of these might be expected to vote with the government, leaving a dependable strength of only 316 or less than a majority of the whole house. See N. Gash, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

4. N. Gash *op. cit.*, pp. 192-3.

5. D. Southgate, *The Passing of the Whigs*, p. 193.

Since the forces opposing the Whigs were fragmented, the government was able to play off one side against the other but in the long run this had the effect of reducing government policy to a series of shifts and compromises and steadily eroded party loyalty amongst the mass of the government's own supporters. Russell's Cabinet had no strategy and the attempt to conciliate all the main interests earned the steady loyalty of none. Russell himself, in striking contrast to Peel, was neither a good party leader nor a good Prime Minister. He lost control of the new House in its first session and never recovered his grip on it.

The government aggravated the situation by proceeding to act in a manner which was bound to alienate, at some point, each section of the House of Commons outside the official Whig following. The Peelites disliked Russell's ecclesiastical policy and Palmerston's handling of foreign policy; the government's education policy and the abandonment of Irish Church reform upset the Dissenters; and more importantly, the Radicals were offended by the apparent aristocratic desire to conciliate the landed interest and by the maintenance of heavy taxation to finance what they viewed as needlessly heavy expenditure on the Colonies.

In April 1848, some fifty or sixty Radicals under the leadership of Cobden and Joseph Hume formed themselves into a separate bloc or group with a programme which included governmental retrenchment, parliamentary and colonial reform.⁶ This group was too individualistic, too quarrelsome and lacked the self-discipline which could have converted them into a fully-fledged political party. Nevertheless the breach between them and the Whigs persisted for the remainder of Russell's administration, and contributed to the latter's instability by serving to demonstrate the fact that it had lost control of the House of Commons.

From the point of view of the government's relations with the Radicals the hostility of the latter to the third Earl Grey (Russell's Colonial Secretary) on matters of Colonial policy was of decisive significance. Any goodwill that Grey might have had — and it could not have been very much — on his assumption of office in 1846⁷ had been dissipated well before 1848, and he was by this time an exceedingly unpopular minister. A succession of Colonial issues emerged in 1847 and 1848 — the Rebellion Losses Bill in

6. Grey MSS: The diary of the Third Earl Grey, 17 April 1848; Russell MSS (Public Record Office, London): Hume to Gibson, 20 April 1848, 30/22/7. See also L. Strachey and R. Fulford, eds., *The Greville Memoirs*, 6 vols. (London, 1937) (hereafter, *Greville Memoirs*) VI, pp. 33–34. Greville's entry for 7 March 1848 in his diary, refers to the Radicals as having declared war on the government.

7. In December 1845 Grey's objections to serving in Russell's cabinet if Palmerston was given the Foreign office had not a little to do with Russell's failure in the attempt to form a government at this time. Grey's intransigence on this occasion had engendered ill-feeling and bitterness towards him which lingered on well beyond it.

See G. P. Gooch, ed., *Later Correspondence of Lord John Russell*, 2 vols. (London, 1930) Vol. I, pp. 86–7. Grey's letter to Russell, 6 December 1845. See also Vol. I, pp. 98–106 for Russell's reaction; *Greville Memoirs*, V, pp. 259–67, 273–76; 284–86; D. Southgate, *Most English Minister*, 177–78; D. Southgate, *The Passing of the Whigs*, p. 129 ff.

Canada, the situation in Cape Colony, the problems in the Australian Colonies and New Zealand, and finally the "rebellion" of 1848 in Ceylon -- to make him the focal point of parliamentary controversy. From 1848 onwards the Radicals, with the Colonial Reformers Molesworth and C. B. Adderley assuming the leadership, launched a sustained campaign against him in an attempt to drive him out of office.

In public, Grey put up a spirited defence against his critics, but in private he sometimes wondered whether he ought not to resign in favour of someone less encumbered with political enemies. His commitment to empire, to Free Trade, and of course, a dogged combativeness kept him in office till 1852 even when Russell hinted that he ought to resign or accept some other portfolio.

It was late in 1848 that the affairs of Ceylon came to attract the attention of Parliament largely due to the resourcefulness of Dr. Christopher Elliott -- a Radical doctor and journalist who was Torrington's gadfly in Colombo -- and his associates in Ceylon. The Colonial Reformers and the Radicals seized this opportunity of launching another assault on the Russell ministry. In February 1849 there was a demand from the Radicals for a Parliamentary Committee to enquire into the administration of Ceylon, British Guiana and Mauritius. From this moment Grey became the central figure of a prolonged parliamentary controversy with his political career at stake and his reputation as Colonial Secretary the subject of acute and acrimonious controversy.

Grey was "anxious to oppose the Comm[itt]ee if it can be done"⁸ and with the support of Hawes he had planned a course of action which seemed designed to cause confusion in the ranks of his critics. Ricardo⁹ was persuaded to introduce an amendment to the motion Baillie¹⁰ had moved:

That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the grievances complained of in the Crown Colonies of Ceylon and British Guiana and to report whether any measures can be adopted for the better administration and Government of those Dependencies.

Ricardo's amendment sought to add the following clause to the original motion:

Whereby they may be rendered more capable of meeting the difficulties of the transition from a system of protection to that of competition in the British market with the produce of foreign states to which Parliament has determined that they should be exposed in accordance with the general commercial policy which it has deliberately adopted.

8. Grey MSS; Grey's Diary, 17 February 1849.

9. The celebrated economist.

10. H. J. Baillie (1803-1885) was M. P. for Inverness-shire for 28 years. He was a considerable West Indian proprietor. He was assisted in organising this attack on the Colonial Office by Mathew Higgins, better known as Jacob Omnium a man of great wit and intelligence. Baillie was later Joint Secretary to the Board of Control for India, 1852 and Under-Secretary for India, 1858-9.

It was a shrewd piece of parliamentary tactics which attempted to exploit the almost emotional antipathy of the Peelites and Radicals to any tampering with Free Trade.¹¹ Though it lost a good deal of its effect when Mauritius was dropped from the scope of the inquiry, its introduction did arouse some suspicion about the original motion in the mind of Peel himself who made pointed reference to the latent but insidious Protectionism in it.¹²

If Grey and Hawes were determined on a policy of obstruction they had no support on this from Russell. On the morning of the debate on Baillie's motion Grey had called on the Prime Minister in the hope of discussing how best to handle the problem. Grey complained that "— he did not appear to give his mind to what I said..."¹³

Grey's own impressions of the debate are available in the entry for 20 February 1849 in his diary. It reads as follows:

... At 5 went to the L[or]ds (which adjourned directly) and thence to the H[ouse] of C[ommons] where I found Baillie speaking. He made a most bitter speech said to have been written by Higgins. Hume seconded more personal still if possible. Ricardo moved his amendment not well having been put out as he said by Baillie's hav[ing] at the last moment omitted Mauritius from his mot[io]n. Hawes followed — the world thinks he spoke well and with success — to me who know what might have been said his speech appeared to the last degree feeble, I sh[ould] have said but for hav[ing] heard Lord John's later. Molesworth, Adderley and F. Scott followed with[ou]t being listened to and then Peel who made a speech very damaging to Torrington from its moderat[io]n. L[or]d John followed, a more deplorable performance I never heard ... After this there was an irregular and most confused discuss[io]n as to whether the amendment was to be put or not in wh[ich] L[or]d John showed the most utter want of conduct of a leader that I ever beheld. I cannot say how struck I was with his want of presence of mind and decis[io]n by which he allowed a position excellent in itself to become most humiliating. There was ultimately no divis[io]n. I came home mortified beyond measure soon after 12... for myself I was surprised not to feel more acutely the very disagreeable posit[io]n in wh[ich] I was placed....

The entry for 21 February affords some clarification of the criticisms heaped on Russell by Grey:¹⁴

...Nothing was required but *in time* to have explained clearly in a few words the object of the amendment and why it was required, and then to have said that if Baillie w[ould] modify his mot[io]n so as clearly to

11. See Grey's Diary, 18, 19, 20 & 21 February 1849.

12. *Hansard*, 3rd Series CII, column 1014.

13. Grey's Diary, 20 February 1849.

14. It is difficult to see what other conclusion any independent observer could have come to. Grey's tactics could hardly be described as straightforward.

exclude an enquiry into commercial grievances [Russell] w[oul]d at once ask Ricardo to withdraw his amendment — not doing this he made the amendment appear to the whole house to have been an abortive trick which it certainly was not....

Indeed the manner in which the government conceded the demand for a Select Committee appeared, to many independent observers, to be a pathetic demonstration of political weakness and ineptitude. Greville, for instance, expressed his dismay at the government's listless handling of this situation.

'February 24 1849. Last Tuesday was as disastrous a night as any Government ever suffered, for it was injurious and humiliating. Baillie had given notice of a Motion for a Committee to enquire into the Gov[ernment] of Ceylon, British Guiana and Mauritius with a view to their better government. He afterwards withdrew Mauritius, and the Government resolved to give the Committee about the other two; and they did this though they knew what was really meant was an attack on Torrington about Ceylon, and on Grey on both sides. Ellice and I told Grey (whom we met at dinner the day before) that they ought not to give the Committee; but he seemed all for it, whether *volens* or *volens* I know not. On Tuesday night this motion came on, and Baillie made the most bitter and abusive speech that could be uttered. He said he meant it as a vote of censure, and he accused Grey (who was sitting in the gallery all the time) of the most disgraceful and dishonorable conduct..... The House went with Baillie and against Grey and Torrington. The Government met the case in a very poor, blundering, low way; a sort of dodge was attempted and totally failed in the shape of an amendment by Ricardo. Peel said a few damaging words, and John Russell made a very poor speech, which had all the air of throwing Grey over. The motion for Committee was carried without any division or resistance, and with scarcely any alteration. The effect was as bad as it could possibly be. The Government and their people were mortified and dejected, Grey immensely disgusted, and the opposition (especially Protectionists) insolent and elated. It is generally believed that if they had divided they would have been beat, for all the scattered sections of the opposition, and some of their friends would have voted against them, and this has revealed the disagreeable truth that they have in fact no hold on the H[ouse] of C[ommons], no certain majority, and whenever all the other parties can find a common ground to meet upon, the Government was sure to be beat.

Graham¹⁵ called on me on Thursday to talk over this debate. He thought it very damaging and very bad; John Russell wretched; he thought after Baillie's speech he ought to have refused the Committee and abided by the consequences, standing up and manfully defending both his colleague and his employe'...¹⁶

15. Sir James Graham the distinguished Peelite statesman.

16. *Greville Memoirs*, VI, p. 58.

Since Grey was not a member of the House of Commons the spokesman for the Colonial Office was Hawes who made a spirited, even blustering, speech in defence of Torrington on the affairs of Ceylon.¹⁷ Its special feature was perhaps the attention paid to the taxation reforms introduced by Torrington. Not only were these deftly placed within the wider context of Imperial Free Trade policy, but they were also shown to be integral parts of an attempt to change the very basis of the colony's tax system from an overwhelming reliance on indirect taxes to a much greater dependence on direct taxes. As for the "rebellion," Hawes endorsed the official version put forward by the Ceylon administration but gave it a credibility and plausibility which Torrington's despatches seldom had. The main point of the exercise was the insistence that the "rebellion" was not directly caused by the taxes, but had been engineered by the Kandyan chiefs and *bhikkhus* who, discontented at the decline of their influence and their religion, unscrupulously exploited popular misapprehensions about the taxes (misapprehensions which they themselves were largely responsible for disseminating among the peasants) in order to generate hostility to the government. The "rebellion," Hawes argued, was a dangerous outbreak of planned violence and the Ceylon government had been compelled to resort to martial law to suppress it, and to continue with martial law for a substantial period of time after the first eruption of 'rebel' activities.

Hawes accused some Colombo newspapers — the reference was obviously to Elliott and *The Colombo Observer* — of giving comfort to the rebels. With much less justification he went on to claim that among the active agents of these newspapers were persons who were directly or indirectly interested in reviving protection in the colonies. This latter charge was without any substantial foundation in fact, but it was clearly intended to draw a reaction from the Peelites, and perhaps to separate them from the Protectionists in the attack on the government over the issue of Torrington's handling of the "rebellion" in Ceylon.

Hawes was on much surer ground in meeting the arguments of Baillie and Hume for the introduction of representative institutions to the colonies on a systematic basis. He pointed out that representative institutions were well established in Canada, and were being introduced to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland as well. A bill was in preparation for the extension of the policy to the Australian Colonies. On the other hand the Colonial Office was opposed in principle to the introduction of representative institutions to colonies like Ceylon and Mauritius as they would inevitably be controlled by a small European settler community to the detriment of the interests of the native population of the colony as a whole.

The defence of the Colonial Office policy on colonial affairs in general and Torrington's administration formed only one aspect of Hawes's assignment.

17. *Hansard*, 3rd series, CII columns 969-87.

The immediate problem was a statement of policy with regard to the appointment of a Parliamentary Committee on the lines outlined in Baillie's motion. Hawes assured the House that neither Grey nor he feared an inquiry of the sort envisaged in this motion, but would on the contrary give it their support even to the extent of having Baillie as chairman of such a Committee. Their one anxiety, he claimed, was to see that such an inquiry should proceed in a settled and calm atmosphere. But when he went on to state that Baillie's motion would be acceptable to the government if Ricardo's amendment were agreed to, it became clear that Hawes's support for a Committee was far from being unconditional. He gave the appearance of being rather too anxious to exploit the opening provided by Ricardo's amendment to suggest a more restricted scope for the Committee's terms of reference. Despite Baillie's forthright rejection of this move, Hawes persisted with it declaring that he expected the amendment to be carried and that he hoped Baillie would agree to preside over the Committee. Such an arrangement, Hawes claimed, was something which impartial men would regard as honest, just and sagacious.

The most impressive speech of the whole debate, and by far the most knowledgeable, was Sir William Molesworth's, displaying a sound grasp of the island's economic and political problems.¹⁸ Molesworth's speech was a superbly constructed attack on the Colonial Office and its policies, and one which effectively met the arguments advanced by Hawes and skilfully exposed their inconsistencies and weak points. Torrington's record of administration in Ceylon was likewise subjected to a thorough and ruthless dissection. The Colonial Office was held to blame for the situation in Ceylon, both because Grey as its head had endorsed the actions of the Ceylon government without substantial reservation, and because its own measures had set in motion a train of events which culminated in the "rebellion."

Grey was oblivious to the merits of Molesworth's speech. Perhaps this was because it was overshadowed by Peel's contribution. Much less partisan and emotional than Baillie and Hume, much less wide-ranging and less critical of the colonial system than Molesworth, Peel was listened to with greater respect and his speech was much more damaging to Torrington and the Colonial Office in the effect it had on the House.¹⁹

Peel's speech settled any lingering doubts that the House would not accept the need for an impartial Committee. Indeed he began with the assumption that the House was agreed on the need for an inquiry, and guided the debate almost effortlessly into the more limited business of framing the terms of reference with greater precision.²⁰ The original motion, Peel suggested,

18. *Hansard*, 3rd series, CII columns 987-1006.

19. Grey MSS: Grey to Torrington, private letters of 21 and 24 February 1849 in K. M. de Silva, ed., *Letters on Ceylon*, 1965, pp. 131-34.

20. For Peel's speech see *Hansard*, 3rd series, CII columns 1013-18.

should be redrafted in such a manner as to make Ricardo's amendment less necessary — the amended motion should not in any way encourage hopes of a revival of protection as (in Peel's view) the original in some ways did. Once this was settled the inquiry could commence, and it should not be regarded as a party matter. Above all the aim of the inquiry should be not so much to censure the Secretary of State as to give content to the inhabitants of Ceylon.

This muted criticism of the Colonial Office, and the controlled understatement of the case against it was followed by an equally restrained criticism of Torrington. Peel declared himself willing to make every allowance for a governor situated as Torrington had been at the time of the outbreak of "rebellion." He was ready even to concede that Torrington's views of the causes of the "rebellion" may well be true and accurate. Nevertheless it was equally true that the tone and temper of the governor's despatches gave cause for concern, in demonstrating that far too little attention had been paid to the grievances of two of the most influential groups among the Kandyan people, the chiefs and the *bhikkhus*. He added that portions of Torrington's despatches were deplorable in their lack of concern for and understanding of the people he was called upon to rule.

"With respect to ... the chiefs" Peel declared, "Lord Torrington says — and I think with great force, I cannot forget the observations made to me by one of the chiefs at a solemn conference held at Kandy last year who said 'if you Britons give nothing towards the support of our religion, and if you have no regard for our national customs, what benefit is the British government to us?'"

"This," Peel declared, "was the address of a native chief to the British Governor. He said nothing of commercial advantage from connection with us, nothing of the privileges enjoyed in being subject to British rule, but he said there are two national things dear to us — our religion and our customs: if you discourage the one, and have no respect for the other, of what use is your rule to us?"

"The Governor observed that this speech had made a great impression on his mind. I wish it were of a more lasting character. And that he had remembered it when he decided, not that the priest must be shot but that it must be in his robes, or when he decided to flog the pretender in public before having him transported as a punishment more feared than death."

"These were acts," Peel asserted, "calculated to alienate from us the minds of the whole population."

The impact of Peel's speech on the House of Commons and on Grey himself is best seen in a private letter from Grey to Torrington giving his own account of the debate in the House of Commons on Baillie's motion.

"I was there all the time," he told Torrington, "and I assure [you] I have seldom passed a less agreeable evening." "I cannot conceal from you," he added "that Sir R. Peel's speech made a great impression upon the house to your disadvantage and damaged both you and myself very seriously." "What did most mischief," he explained, "was the very imprudent statement in your despatch No. 164 that a Priest had been shot in full robes...²¹. The light manner in wh[ic]h you speak of it, has been most injurious to you in public estimation here... the moment I read this despatch I saw that it w[oul]d get us into a scrape and yet it was impossible coming as it did in the middle of your narrative of these transactions that I c[oul]d abstain from printing it. Your despatch No. 185 transmitting your correspondence with the Chief Justice also did much harm and I must candidly tell you that I am not surprised that none of our friends in the House of Commons w[oul]d say a word in its defence... [By] writing as you did you have brought on yourself all the odium of the utmost severity without the advantage of the terror wh[ic]h severity c[oul]d have inspired and have enabled [your critics] to hold you up to the H[ouse] of Commons as a person thirsting for more blood and resenting your disappointment by an angry letter to a humane and upright judge -- I know the absurdity of these imputations but they are not the less injurious..."²²

In a separate letter he told Torrington that

...what I find fault with is not what you have *done* (except repealing the ordinances you had passed) but the manner in wh[ic]h you have related your proceedings in your public dispatches...²³

After Peel's masterly and statesmanlike speech (a contribution to the debate singularly free from the rancour and personal animosities so dominant in the speeches of the other participants) Russell's defence of Torrington and the Colonial Office was curiously tepid and half-hearted.²⁴ It was as though he acknowledged the strength of Peel's and Molesworth's criticisms of Torrington's administration. Russell's speech had nothing of the wide-ranging sweep of Molesworth's or Hawes's speeches, nothing of Molesworth's depth of understanding of Ceylon's problems, or indeed anything of the fervour or moral indignation of Peel's devastating speech. Grey did not conceal his disappointment with Russell's performance. "I do not say that our friends there [the House of Commons]," he told Torrington, "did for us all that might have been expected. Hawes spoke very gallantly but he was not backed as he should have been..."²⁵

21. The reference was to the execution of Kadahapola Kuda Unanse.

22. Grey MSS: Grey to Torrington, private letter of 21 February 1849, *op. cit.*

23. *Ibid.*: Grey to Torrington, private letter of 24 February 1849, *op. cit.*

24. *Hansard*, 3rd series, CII, columns 1018-27.

25. Grey MSS: Grey to Torrington, private letter of 21 February 1849.

If Peel's speech had ensured that the House of Commons would insist on the appointment of a Committee of Inquiry, it had also raised the issue of Protection and Free Trade. It was left to Disraeli, on behalf of the Protectionists, to exorcise any Protectionist ghosts that may have lurked within or behind Baillie's fairly straightforward motion.²⁶ Disraeli's speech was superb in its wit and sarcasm, and especially effective in deflating the pretensions of Ricardo, and indeed in showing up the shifts and inconsistencies involved in Hawes's attempt to insist on the incorporation of Ricardo's amendment as a condition for the acceptance of Baillie's original motion. He pointed out that Hawes at the beginning of his speech had accepted the need for an inquiry, and with this concession of the main point of the debate the House had emptied. Whereupon, twenty minutes later, and obviously seeking time for further instructions, he clogged his original promise with the condition that Ricardo's amendment (an amendment which was obviously unpalatable to those who supported Baillie's motion) must be accepted. Baillie's motion, he declared, was honest and straightforward: Ricardo's amendment "a perversion of the mind" and "a hallucination."

The ridicule to which it was subjected by Disraeli, deprived Ricardo's amendment of any slight prospect it may have had of acceptance even in a greatly modified form. It had none at all when Disraeli declared that it must be abandoned if members wished to maintain the character of the House for straight dealing.

The debate thereafter narrowed down to a mere discussion of the terms of reference of a Committee of Inquiry. As a compromise both Baillie's motion and Ricardo's amendment were withdrawn. A fresh motion, and one acceptable to all sections of the House, was drafted. It read as follows:

That a select committee be appointed to inquire into the grievances complained of in the crown colonies of Ceylon and British Guiana, in connection with the Administration and Government of those Dependencies, and to report whether any measures can be adopted for the redress of any grievances of which there may be shown just reason to complain and also whether any measures can be adopted for the better Administration and Government of those Dependencies.

The Committee of Inquiry, nominated on 27 February 1849, consisted of fifteen members with H. J. Baillie as Chairman. The other members in alphabetical order were: C. B. Adderley, Major Blackall, Benjamin Disraeli, W. E. Gladstone, B. Hawes, Sir J. W. Hogg, Lord Hotham, Joseph Hume, W. T. McCullagh, Sir Robert Peel, F. W. C. Villiers, Sir J. Walmsley, J. Wilson and J. S. Wortley. Of these Baillie, Hume and Adderley were outspoken critics of Grey and the Colonial office, while Hawes and Wilson were the chief spokesmen for the government within the Committees.

26. *Hansard*, 3rd series, CH columns, 1027-1034.

For the better part of two years, 1849 and 1850, the Committee on Ceylon remained one of the focal points of parliamentary controversy, not indeed for any intrinsic value attached to the affairs of Ceylon, but exploited for its potential as a political issue against a weak administration, and an unpopular Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Just after the Committee was appointed Grey, in a moment of acute despondency, with Peel's words ringing in his ears perhaps, expressed his doubts to Torrington about coming off very well from the inquiry. But in a matter of a few days he had recovered his spirits sufficiently to give Torrington the confident assurance that "...we shall carry you handsomely thro[ugh] the Comm[itt]ee..."²⁷

Grey believed that both Colonial Office policy and Torrington's record of administration could have been defended with greater conviction and emphasis than had been done by the government (by all save Hawes) in the House of Commons. He told Torrington that:

...the whole part of the debate in the H[ouse] of Commons was far too apologetic and unfortunately Brougham [in the House of Lords] has contented himself with keeping a notice (of a motion on Ceylon) with no day named on the order book the whole session without venturing to bring it forward. I w[ould]d have made him a handsome present if he w[ould]d but have given me an opportunity of speaking for myself in defence of what you have done for Ceylon...²⁸

This confidence seemed justified when the first phase of the Committee's work, the British Guiana inquiry, was over by May 1849 with little damage to Grey and the Colonial Office. In a letter of 24 May 1849 Grey reported to Torrington that:

The Comm[itt]ee has not yet begun their Ceylon inquiry and I doubt whether it will make anything of it this season, as we shall, I hope, be able to prorogue early. Therefore proceed with your measures just as if it was not in existence. I have no apprehension at all of it coming to any unfortunate conclusion – We have just had the Demarara part of the case closed. Baillie has been completely foiled and Hawes has succeeded in getting a report carried with wh[ic]h I am upon the whole satisfied...²⁹

Thus while the appointment of the Committee was viewed at first as a setback to Grey and the Colonial Office, it soon became evident that Grey — or any mid-nineteenth century colonial secretary for that matter — was at an advantage over his critics on the Committee in that at a time when a letter or a despatch to Ceylon took the better part of two months to reach the Island

27. Grey MSS: Grey's private letter to Torrington, 24 February 1849 in K. M. de Silva, ed. *Letters on Ceylon*, 1965, p. 131.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

29. *Ibid.*

the information available to him was, at every stage, more comprehensive than that available to them. The Colonial Office could and did hamper the Committee by withholding all but the most obvious official sources of information - the despatches and their enclosures. Grey had a voluminous demi-official private correspondence with Torrington, and with C. J. MacCarthy the island's Auditor-General and the son-in-law of Benjamin Hawes. At no stage was any of this material made available to the Committee. Indeed this demi-official private correspondence was used extensively to thwart and obstruct the work of the Committee. Nor would Grey agree to appear in person before the committee. And besides, the presence of Hawes as a member of the Committee was a distinct advantage, not only as a means of access to the Committee's transactions, and discussions, but also for the purpose of cross examining witnesses on the basis of official information available to the Colonial Office, and for guiding the discussions and cross-examination to the advantage of Torrington.

With the completion of the British Guiana phase of their proceedings the Committee turned to review and investigate the affairs of Ceylon. The first witness from Ceylon appeared before the Committee on 5 June 1849. He was George Ackland, pioneer planter and merchant, one time head of the agency house of Ackland Boyd and Company, the leading planting and merchant house in the island until it collapsed in the depression of 1847-8; as a "non-official" member of the Legislative Council, he had played a leading role in the agitation for Legislative Council reform. His evidence which ranged over a variety of subjects (reflecting his own interests and record of achievement) from economic and commercial to administrative and constitutional, was, on the whole, judiciously fair in outlook, incisive and analytical in comment and comprehensive in range. The second witness was an obviously partisan figure, T. Y. McChristie, Dr. Elliott's agent in England. His evidence was clearly hostile to Torrington. Not only did it set forth the view that the suppression of a far from dangerous rebellion had been needlessly harsh, but it also raised doubts about the need for the imposition of martial law, and for its long continuance. On 12 June, Sir Herbert Maddock³⁰ appeared before the Committee, and restored the balance, as it were, by making a zealous defence of Torrington's administration in relation to every aspect of the rebellion and its suppression. His defence of Torrington's administration, however, was not very sophisticated or very coherent in all its details, and it did not succeed in clearing up the doubts created by Ackland's evidence, and much less the serious charges levelled by McChristie.

30. Lt. Gen. Sir Herbert Maddock was the government's most trusted adviser at Kandy during the "rebellion" of 1848. A retired East India Company official, he was at this time a coffee planter at Matale. His coffee store in Matale bazaar was burnt down by the rebels. He was the evil genius behind the whole policy of repression adopted by Torrington's administration.

Maddock first went to India in 1814. He rose to the position of Secretary to the Government of India in the Legal, Judicial and Revenue Departments, 1838-43; member of the Governor General's Council, 1843-48; and Deputy Governor of Bengal in 1845 and 1848.

Maddock was followed by a much more formidable figure, P. E. Wodehouse (he first appeared before the Committee on 19 June), one of the ablest and most senior civil servants in Ceylon and a member of the Executive Council since 1847. A man of pronounced independence of outlook, his evidence like Ackland's was judicious and comprehensive. He was on leave in England at this time and he did not appear as an official witness for Torrington's administration bent on a defence of every aspect of its work. Thus the impact of his testimony on the committee was much greater than if he had been a partisan witness. While he defended most aspects of Torrington's record of administration, his evidence cast grave doubts on some of it, especially with regard to the imposition of martial law and the continuation of martial law, and with respect to some of the taxes imposed in 1847/48. Though E. Talbot, a less senior civil servant, attempted a more whole-hearted defence of the Ceylon government, he did not succeed in resolving the doubts created among members of the Committee by Wodehouse's evidence.

Thus by the end of June 1849 the picture that had emerged from the evidence before the Committee was far from complimentary to Torrington, if indeed it did not constitute a *prima facie* case of maladministration in taxation and inordinate severity in the ruthless crushing of a minor "rebellion" which had itself been provoked by acts of omission and commission on the part of an unsympathetic administration.

At this stage the Committee resolved to request Earl Grey to attend its sittings, and enquired whether he would object to appear before it and be examined on matters within the Committee's terms of reference.³¹ It was an invitation which he was hardly likely to have accepted, despite his anxiety to speak "for [himself] in defence of what [Torrington] had done for Ceylon." While it might have afforded him an opportunity for making a public defence of his record of administration before a Committee of the House of Commons, there was always the danger of acrimonious cross-talk with members of the Committee, and hostile cross-examination by some of his most consistent critics in Parliament, Hume and Adderley, who were members of the Committee, to say nothing of the Chairman, Baillie. There was also the danger that confidential information detrimental to Torrington's cause might be extracted from Grey in the process of cross-examination. In his own mind Grey had doubts about several aspects of Torrington's administration and he could not possibly have defended these with any sincerity; for in Ceylon too much had been done in haste, and without regard to policy or principle. So he took the easy way out by informing the Committee that he was not aware of any evidence that was at his disposal which had not already been made available to the Committee. This of course was by no means the whole truth. Quite apart from the confidential information available to him through his voluminous private correspondence with Torrington, and C. J. MaCarthy there were occasions when official information of a confidential nature and likely to cause

31. B.P.P. 1849 (591) XI, *Third Report on the Select Committee on Ceylon and British Guiana* pp. vi-vii.

legal difficulties for the Ceylon administration was not made available to the Committee.³² Grey's private correspondence with Torrington reveals the fact that Grey was never inclined to give the Committee anything more than the bare minimum of official information.

Grey informed the Committee that if they would specify points on which his evidence would be of use to them, he would provide that information through official channels.³³ This the Committee proceeded to do with a thoroughness that must certainly have impressed Grey and the Colonial Office. They asked for detailed information on a variety of broad themes: the necessity for the imposition of martial law and its prolonged maintenance; the courts martial; the confiscation and sequestration of property; the minutes of proceedings of the Executive and Legislative Councils of Ceylon; the relations between the government and the Buddhist religion and priesthood; and proposals for and discussions on the amendment of the island's constitution. Having specified these themes, the Chairman privately forwarded to Grey a formidable list of questions requiring detailed information.

Grey's reply of 11 July 1849 was brief, and unhelpful. The Committee was informed that he had no further information to supply. With this, began a bitter dispute between the Colonial Office (and Grey in particular) and the Committee, which culminated in an acrimonious debate in the House of Commons at the end of July.

The Committee in the meantime had resumed its examination of witnesses, beginning with a re-examination of P. E. Wodehouse on 3 July. The examination of witnesses continued till 19 July when crisis point was reached in the deterioration of relations between the Committee and the Colonial Office, during the evidence of T. Y. McChristie on that date.³⁴ McChristie's evidence related to the shooting of a *bhikkhu*, Kadahapola Kuda Unanse, and Torrington's role in it—in particular, his curt dismissal of H. C. Selby, the Queen's Advocate, when the latter had attempted to intercede for clemency for the condemned *bhikkhu* on the grounds that the evidence at his trial was unsatisfactory, and the witnesses against him unreliable. Pressed by some members of the Committee for evidence to substantiate this serious charge, McChristie referred to two letters he had received from Elliott in which this information had been conveyed. Hawes and Blackall called on McChristie, to produce the letters for the Committee's perusal, but the latter claiming that they were in the nature of confidential and private information given by a client (Elliot) to his lawyer, refused to do so. But Hawes and Blackall were adamant on the production of the letters. A heated debate ensued among the members of the Committee and eventually a resolution moved by Blackall was adopted. It read as follows:

32. B.P.P. 1849 (591) XI, *Third Report of the Select Committee on Ceylon and British Guiana*, pp. vi–vii.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, pp. viii–x.

That Mr. McChristie do produce to the Committee the letters on which he founds the grievance complained of in the Colony, that Lord Torrington used the expression 'That if all the judges and proctors in Ceylon were to say that the man was innocent he should nevertheless be executed next day.'

When the Committee resumed its sittings on 24th July 1849, it resolved that McChristie was at liberty to prove the charge he had made by producing the letters, or withdraw the allegation if he would not produce them. McChristie preferred to produce the letters. The question then arose whether these letters should be printed along with the Committee's report and minutes of evidence, and it was resolved by 7 votes to 2 (Hawes and Walmsley) that these two letters should not be printed till further orders were received from the Committee. On 26 July the decision was taken to print the two letters at the relevant points in the record of evidence.

While this question was being resolved, two important witnesses were being examined, Philip Anstruther who had been Colonial Secretary of the island for a period of fifteen years from 1830 to 1845, and Major Thomas Skinner, soldier and roadmaker. Anstruther's evidence was notable for a root and branch criticism of the financial measures attempted by Tennent and Torrington. He contrasted these with his own more prudent measures. And his evidence on other features of Torrington's administration, in particular the events leading to the 'rebellion' and the methods adopted in suppressing the 'rebellion' must have strengthened the doubts already created in the minds of members of the Committee by Wodehouse's testimony. Skinner's evidence unlike Anstruther's was not in any way hostile to the government but its most notable feature was a long and comprehensive memorandum on the social, economic and political conditions of the Kandyan provinces from their cession to the British in 1815 to 1847. This memorandum was too comprehensive, and its tone too objective, to be entirely satisfactory to Torrington's administration. Indeed its description of the breakdown of law and order, and the break up of the traditional social order in precisely the two districts in which the 'rebellion' broke out were well nigh prophetic.

The Committee, in the meantime, was faced with a vexatious problem. A great deal of evidence had been laid before them, much of it unfavourable to Torrington. At the same time there was the feeling that this did not constitute all the evidence and information that was available. Many members deplored Grey's uncooperative attitude, and they resented the fact that Grey and Hawes, the latter within the Committee itself, had thwarted all their attempts at a thorough and complete review of all aspects of the question. Most of the members of the Committee felt that a *prima facie* case of maladministration could be made out against Torrington, though there were others who felt that their regard for him, and his administration, was enhanced with the unfolding of the evidence laid before the Committee.

The discussions and debate within the Committee can best be reconstructed by the evidence that emerged from the debate in the House of Commons in July 1849. (The minutes of the Committee are too threadbare for any such purpose.) It was clear that Hawes, intent on thwarting any attempt to probe too deeply into the affairs of Ceylon, exploited every opportunity available to him to place obstacles in the way of the Committee's chairman and such critics of Colonial Office policy as Hume and Walmsley.

C. P. Villiers, in the course of the debate in the House of Commons, explained that the evidence given on the last two days of the Committee's sitting — this referred quite clearly to the evidence of Anstruther and McChristie — had thrown great light on the state of affairs of the Colony. This had had a notable effect on the Committee's attitude to the question of the publication of the evidence laid before it. Villiers stated that before these witnesses gave their evidence the Committee would not have been disinclined to publish the evidence, but thereafter the Committee decided on further inquiry into the affairs of Ceylon before it would consent to the publication of minutes of evidence.³⁵ Hume, in fact, was all for publishing the evidence and moved a resolution to this effect, but he had no support at all, with every member of the Committee voting against it. And they voted against it because they felt the evidence to be incomplete and imperfect. Disraeli explained that as it stood the evidence appeared to convey a *prima facie* case against Torrington, but since the Committee believed the evidence to be incomplete, they thought it unfair to Torrington to publish it in that form. There was practically unanimous support for this course of action in the Committee.³⁶

Once Hume's motion was rejected it became necessary to decide on a suitable course of action as regards the completion of the Committee's inquiries. This was especially urgent because the close of the parliamentary session was at hand. Many members of the Committee felt that even without expressing an opinion about the conduct of any individual, the gravity of the circumstances elicited by the inquiry rendered it impossible for the Committee to remain in abeyance for six months. One line of action which appealed to them was the appointment of a Commission to conduct its investigations on the spot. To this latter course of action Hawes was inflexibly opposed.

As a compromise Disraeli moved that, instead of an investigation on the spot, the Committee should ask leave to sit in the next sessions of Parliament, and that it should communicate with the Secretary of State on the need for further and fuller investigation. Villiers had persuaded Disraeli to tone down his resolution. But even in this form it was more than Hawes was inclined to accept. Villiers then asked Hawes for an assurance that further information would be procured, but found no such assurance forthcoming.

35. *Hansard*, 3rd series, CVII, columns 1092-4/House of Commons, 28 July 1849.

36. *Ibid.*, columns 1089-92.

It was at this stage, after every attempt to get a reasonable compromise accepted had failed that Lord Hotham had moved:

That the chairman be instructed to move the House that an humble address be presented to Her Majesty praying that Her Majesty will be pleased to appoint a Commission to inquire on the spot into the measures taken for the suppression of the late insurrection in Ceylon.

The motion was carried on the chairman's casting vote. It was further resolved "that the resolution as agreed to by the Committee be reported to the House" and also

that the Chairman be authorised and requested to communicate with Her Majesty's Secretary of State as to the necessary witnesses to be ordered home to give evidence before the Committee to be appointed in the ensuing session.

Villiers explained that this motion was carried only because Hawes was adamant in his refusal to accept a compromise such as that moved by Disraeli. He added that the acceptance of Hotham's resolution was not a reflection of a desire on the part of the Committee to impugn Torrington: this was certainly not the necessary consequence of its resolution. The resolution, in fact, was arrived at on the grounds of doing justice to Torrington; the committee had voted for demanding further information, instead of publishing the evidence as it stood.

In moving the Committee's resolution in the House of Commons on 28 July, H. J. Baillie outlined the reasons why it was felt that a Commission on the spot would be the best means of further eliciting the truth with regard to the situation in Ceylon.³⁷ These were broadly: the Ceylon government had neglected to send to Whitehall information which it was bound by the Royal Instructions to send, viz, the minutes of proceedings of the Councils, which were due every six months but had not been sent for over twelve; either the Colonial Office, or the Horse Guards, or both, neglected to obtain from the authorities in Ceylon, the proceedings of Court Martials held in Ceylon in 1848. Very grave accusations had been levelled against the government of Ceylon, and it was impossible to get at the truth of these accusations in the normal way.

Baillie explained that as the parliamentary sessions were drawing to a close the Committee had unanimously agreed that the statements made before it ought not to stand without giving the governor a chance to refute them. They preferred, for this purpose, the despatch of a Commission to the island, rather than the delays inherent in the re-appointment of the Committee in the next sessions of Parliament.

37. *Hansard*, 3rd series, CVII, columns 1079-81. 28 July 1849/.

There was no doubt that the despatch of a Commission to inquire on the spot was an extra-ordinary measure which could only be justified by circumstances of an equally extraordinary nature. It was difficult to quote precedents for a decision of this sort, and the only analogy Baillie could think of was the Chancery Court, which occasionally sent Commissions to India to take evidence not otherwise obtainable. His case was weak.

This time the Prime Minister was in a more belligerent mood than he had been when the motion for the appointment of Baillie's committee had come before the House of Commons in February, and there was no tepidity or diffidence in his support of Grey or Torrington. He had little difficulty in meeting some of Baillie's arguments: thus, he showed the House that Chancery procedure afforded no analogy for a parliamentary process. His arguments that a Commission of the sort envisaged in Baillie's motion, to enquire into the means taken to suppress an insurrection could gravely undermine the authority of the governor, that indeed it would be an extraordinary step to send such a commission and yet leave the governor to exercise his normal official functions, were perhaps unanswerable. And so in its own way was Russell's charge that the evidence before the Committee was not substantial enough to show the need for an extraordinary measure of the sort envisaged in the Committee's motion. These were clearly the weak links in Baillie's arguments and Russell hammered away at them.

Russell combined this very effective criticism of Baillie's arguments with an attack on the Committee and its work. He claimed, perhaps on the advice of Hawes, that in the Committee, the motion calling for a Commission to inquire on the spot, had been introduced and carried without previous notice, a charge which was clearly at variance with the facts as they were revealed in the course of the debate. He next accused the Committee of having condemned Torrington without hearing his evidence, of behaving like the Courts of Inquisition in Spain or Venice. Once again the charge was grossly unfair to the Committee, and at variance with facts. Baillie was challenged to resort to the manly course of impeaching the governor instead of resorting to the devious tactics involved in a Commission of inquiry on the spot.

But while the Prime Minister was inflexibly opposed to such a Commission he nevertheless declared his willingness to allow the Committee to complete its work in the next session of parliament if they felt that their inquiry was incomplete. All the same if completion of their work was their main aim, he could not see any need for the resolution moved by Baillie, one which was in effect a vote of censure on the government.

After Russell's decisive and forceful speech Hume, and later Lord Hotham, sought to retrieve the situation for the Committee by explaining in detail the circumstances in which the motion had emerged in the Committee, to show that adequate notice of it had been given, and that any departure from the rules had been the result of an error on the part of the clerk of the committee.

Hume's speech was in its own way quite as belligerent as Russell's, and his defence of the Committee's action was even more wholehearted than Baillie's.³⁸ His arguments, briefly, were that: with the evidence before the Committee of an inordinately heavy sacrifice of lives, the exercise of powers and promulgation of orders unknown except in Ceylon, the evidence of the confiscation of property of innocent persons and its sale at great loss and sacrifice to them — the only satisfaction offered being a promise to return proceeds of sales — it behoved the House to demand a full investigation to protect the lives and property of Her Majesty's subjects; for this purpose a Commission on the spot was needed; and no other mode of enquiry could ensure that justice would be done. He asserted that Russell's refusal to accept this motion was tantamount to a decision to shield a governor charged with improper conduct.

The fact, however, was that a Commission of inquiry on the spot was too sharp a departure from the normal to have any chance of acceptance by any government of the day, Whig or Tory. Thus Vernon Smith, who had been Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Colonial Office under Stanley during Peel's administration, argued against Baillie's proposals in a manner which would have given encouragement to the Russell Ministry.³⁹ He declared that the mere fact of the appointment of the Committee would serve to impair the governor's powers and operate as a vote of censure to a certain extent, but a Commission sent to investigate on the spot "would do away with his authority altogether from the very moment they landed." Indeed, if it was necessary to institute such an inquiry it was better to recall the governor first, because an investigation of this nature was in many ways a punishment worse than a recall. Smith argued that the motion before the House was in effect a censure of the governor, and he urged that it would never do to brand a governor with censure except on the most satisfactory and conclusive evidence. He might, he added, vote for impeachment if the evidence warranted it, but he would not vote for this motion.

Disraeli's defence of the Committee's actions was introduced by an incisive refutation of Russell's arguments: but even more effective in its impact on the House was Disraeli's carefully detailed description of the stages by which the Committee came to adopt the resolution placed before the House: how the Committee decided against Hume's motion to publish the evidence available to it; and how the resolution came to be carried as a last resort after Hawes's stubborn refusal to compromise. The Committee, he reminded the House, was an all-party Committee. It had conducted a protracted and painstaking investigation with moderation and impartiality, which entitled it to the respect and support of the House. All that was now required was a firm decision to ensure a complete investigation into the situation in Ceylon, into some of the most complex and crucially significant problems that could ever arise in a British Colony. It was up to the government, he urged, to prove their *bona fides*

38. *Ibid.*, columns 1084-88.

39. *Ibid.*, columns 1088-89.

on colonial matters, by supporting this investigation, and in so doing to guarantee a measure of justice to their Colonial fellow-subjects.

Charles Villiers, like Disraeli, defended the Committee's role on this issue, and clarified many points relating to its discussions and decisions. So too did Lord Hotham⁴⁰ who had actually moved the resolution under discussion in the House, in the Committee.

Hotham's speech was notable for its restraint and moderation of tone. His sole object in moving the resolution originally in the Committee had been to obtain information and he believed that an inquiry on the spot was the best method of doing so. He was nevertheless willing to agree to any course of action which the House would regard as preferable to that outlined in the motion provided that it would ensure that the information required was obtained, and investigations begun earlier in the year be completed. While he was very much aware of the need to support the Governor of a colony at a time of trouble, he believed that there was at the same time as great an obligation to complete an inquiry which had been left incomplete.

The subdued tone of this eminently judicious defence of the Committee's actions must certainly have heightened the effectiveness of his trenchant criticism of Grey and the Colonial Office for their policy of studied non-cooperation with the Committee. Hotham made the point that even accepting Grey's assurance that he had given the Committee all the information at his disposal, it was remarkable that more information had not been received on the points raised by the Committee. He asked whether the Committee had merely to accept Grey's expression of satisfaction with things as they were, and forego or abandon any attempt to probe more deeply into the affairs of Ceylon?

It was left to Graham, to suggest the acceptance of the compromise offered by Disraeli and Villiers which Hawes had unwisely rejected.⁴¹ He informed the House that he understood Disraeli and Villiers to say that if pledges were given to continue the inquiry, and that the Secretary of State would obtain the information called for, this motion would not have been pressed. Graham was himself opposed to the motion on very practical grounds; a Commission on the spot would cause considerable confusion, or on the other hand, the Government anticipating this possibility might decide to recall Torrington before the Commission was constituted.

He reiterated his conviction that the compromise suggested by him was an honourable one, and declared that he did not think that Baillie would press the acceptance of his motion if the Prime Minister would consent to the re-appointment of the Committee at the beginning of the next session of Parliament.

40. *Ibid.*, columns 1094-97.

41. *Ibid.*, columns 1097-99.

Russell was not averse to the acceptance of this sensible compromise but he would not agree to the withdrawal of the motion. Instead he called upon the House to reject it because it affected the character and honour of a governor of a distant colony. He insisted on this course of action despite Graham's appeals for a simple withdrawal of the motion. It was, as C. N. Newdegate (Warwickshire N^o) pointed out,⁴² an illogical course of action for the Prime Minister to take,⁴³ for Russell clearly admitted the need for the inquiry, yet wanted the House to reject a motion whose object was to establish an enquiry. Newdegate added that one of two constructions could be placed on this: either by his admission of the need to inquire he cast imputations on Torrington's conduct but opposed the most readily available means of investigation, or he wished the House to vote what would look like a vote of confidence in Torrington after a Committee was appointed to inquire into his administration and that Committee had stated that further evidence was required to complete the inquiry.

But Russell stood his ground. The House divided, with 33 voting for and 90 against the resolution. This done, the Committee was reappointed for the next parliamentary sessions.

By the middle of 1849 it became evident that the focus of attention of the Committee was beginning to shift to Colombo, and that with this development, the personality of the island's Governor, Grey's *protege*, Viscount Torrington would emerge as a crucial factor in future sessions of the Committee. But Grey and Hawes, at this stage, had no reason to fear that their defence was likely to be any more vulnerable in Colombo than it had been so far in London. A rebellion would tax the skills (and nerves) of the most experienced colonial administrators, and Torrington confronted with one had, at the beginning, reacted to the problems emerging from it intelligently and competently though not with any great imagination. He gave the impression of a man who had measured up to the pressures of his office quite adequately and seemed to be well in control of an awkward situation. There was an air of efficiency in the manner in which he responded to the prosaic tasks of rehabilitation and reconstruction after the "rebellion" had been put down. His tendency to attribute the outbreak of rebellion to factors as remotely connected with his government's policies as possible, was perhaps understandable. But there was a querulous sensitivity to even the friendliest of criticisms (though not to criticism from Grey), and this was combined with an arrogant refusal to admit that he might have made some mistakes.

When Grey, in a letter to Torrington in late February 1849, expressed his confident expectation that "we shall utterly discomfit Hume and Baillie," he

42. *Ibid.*, columns 1100.

43. It was only in February 1850 that Russell explained why he resorted to this course of action, (*ibid.*, CVII, columns 444-449).

was not merely seeking to comfort Torrington, but making a sober assessment of the situation that existed. He had no reason to believe that Torrington would be unduly upset by the Committee's investigations; indeed he hoped that Torrington could be relied upon to handle the defence of his administration sensibly and competently.

But from the beginning the appointment of the Committee had a most unsettling effect on Torrington personally, as well as on the colonial administration in Ceylon. Torrington viewed the Committee's investigations as "... agitation ... kept up at home," and as "a continuous stream of unmerited persecution ..."⁴⁴ Torrington was at once irritated by the Committee's investigations, and fearful of their consequences in terms of his future as a Colonial administrator, though he tried hard to disguise this with an occasional flash of arrogance combined with his customary self-righteousness. The climacterical point was September 1849 when he came to learn of Wodehouse's evidence. This he viewed as base treachery and he responded with a furious burst of ill-temper. From thereon his grip on affairs in Ceylon became increasingly insecure, and he lost all sense of proportion in his pursuit of his enemies. Wodehouse he regarded as one of the chief among these. One of the consequences of his vendetta against Wodehouse was its contribution to the deterioration of personal relations among the senior officials in the upper echelons of the government. Inevitably this had a demoralising effect on the whole administrative machinery of the island, which, in turn, militated against the efficient organization of the Ceylon government's defence before the Committee.

There was also a more resourceful and formidable antagonist in Ceylon - Dr. Christopher Elliott. Their enmity had begun almost from the outset of Torrington's administration of Ceylon in 1847. The rebellion served to aggravate it. The appointment of the Committee owed not a little to Elliott's initiative and his influence with the Radicals in the British parliament, in particular with Joseph Hume, M.P.

These two factors, the deterioration of personal relations among the senior officials in Torrington's administration, and the confrontation between Elliott and Torrington proved to be crucially important in Torrington's discomfiture before the parliamentary Committee.

To Torrington and an administration shaken by the "rebellion," Dr. Christopher Elliott and *The Colombo Observer* loomed larger than life as resourceful, even dangerous, adversaries whose activities needed to be treated as a threat to the security of the colony and had therefore to be curbed as expeditiously as possible.

The outbreak of "rebellion" had put *The Colombo Observer* somewhat on the defensive, and its leading article of 31 July 1848 written against the

44. Grey MSS: Torrington's private letter to Grey, 11 August 1849, *Letters on Ceylon*, 1965.

background of the rebel attack on Matale and the skirmish at Wariyapola (near Matale), demonstrated an anxiety to dissociate itself from the "rebellion." But if it came down on the side of law and order, it did so in a manner which caused acute embarrassment to the government by raising issues which the latter was most anxious to play down. Thus an astutely worded dissociation from the violence at Matale was introduced by a reference to the unpopular taxes which, in its opinion, had provoked "the open revolt." It complained about the "..... precipitancy in the sudden proclamation of Martial Law... [before] all other fair means of suppressing the insurrection have been tried." "The *first* thing, on the contrary done here," it added, "is the proclamation of Martial Law and that not confined to Matale but to the Kandyan districts generally. We shudder at the awful consequences it might lead to ..."

Within a few days of the outbreak and suppression of the "rebellion," *The Colombo Observer* abandoned its newly adopted defensive stance and returned to its customary role of the administration's gadfly. More important, it became the most prominent, if not the solitary source of opposition to the administration in the aftermath of the "rebellion." (After the events of 29 July to 1 August there was no further resistance from the Kandyans. The "rebellion" was comprehensively crushed, and the people were too demoralised to think of opposition to the government.) Even the restraints imposed by the delicacy of its position as the solitary voice of opposition to a colonial administration which was anxious to attribute the outbreak or rebellion, in part at least, to the activities of European 'agitators', could not persuade that journal from making impudent or forthright attacks on the administration. On 4 August it declared that "... The joint administration of Lord Torrington and Sir E. Tennent will be recorded in the annals of Ceylon as having consummated the ruin of this flourishing Colony ...". Nor would it refrain from raising issues embarrassing to the government: on 10 August it argued that "..... Government by the remission of the new taxes could at once dissociate the mass of the people from the Chiefs and Priests, and thus render the latter powerless of evil..."

The government hit back with all the resources at its disposal. Torrington, in his despatches to Whitehall, and in his speeches in Ceylon, kept on insinuating that the "rebellion" in the Kandyan areas had been kindled by "the treasonable pretensions of an adventurer." The reference was to Elliot. And Grey himself was persuaded to endorse this view in his official despatches to Torrington written in support of the measures taken by the Ceylon government to suppress the disturbances. Given the passions and tensions of those days it was no matter for surprise that attempts would be made — and not merely by the government — to portray *the Colombo Observer's* campaign against the taxes prior to the outbreak of the rebellion as dangerously irresponsible and inflammatory. The government's supporters began a campaign to boycott *The Colombo Observer*. The government itself resorted to the customary methods of official retaliation against a troublesome press by imposing a ban on official advertisements in that journal, and forbidding public servants

on pain of dismissal from service, from "forwarding communications anonymously or in their own names to the newspapers, supplying them with information, and acting as their correspondents..."

The Colombo Observer had its own partisans, and the attempts to gag the journal only increased their numbers and strengthened their resolve to support a fearless critic under attack by the government. A subscription was raised for a testimonial to Elliott (for his "praiseworthy conduct") and "for the purpose of taking two copies of *The Observer* for every one that has been or may be given up in consequence of the [boycott]."

The journal itself had its own methods of retaliation. The moves to gag it only strengthened its nerve and helped restore it to its original pugnacity. The administration's attempt to collect petitions from the several communities resident in the island, and from all parts of the country, pledging loyalty to the government and endorsing the official version of the origin and causes of the "rebellion," was dismissed as a dishonest exercise in propaganda. And it persisted in its policy of ridiculing the Governor and his Colonial Secretary, but more especially the former. Elliott and the Editor of *The Colombo Observer*, A. M. Ferguson, had accurately gauged Torrington's weaknesses, and they goaded him with impudent and caustic criticism, in confident anticipation of an impetuous and ill-tempered reaction that was certain to place Torrington in worse light than ever. Thus when the *Government* announced that the reward for the capture of the Pretender had been raised from £100 to £150, *The Colombo Observer* in its issue of 12 August remarked that:

Our market report will thus shew a small advance on one article at least. 'Kings is riz' — there is a more than compensating fall in Governors.

On 17 August the paper criticised Torrington again:

Lord Torrington did yesterday what he ought to have done at the beginning of the outbreak — he went to Kandy

But this was a mild pinprick compared to its leader on Torrington in its issue of 13 September.

On another important point — the character of our present Governor — his absolute unfitness to represent royalty and rule a people — his lamentable deficiency in temper, judgement and all the higher qualities that go to the formation of a statesman's character — the public is at this moment unanimous or fast becoming so. In such a position of affairs the Colonist ought to be satisfied with nothing short of His Excellency's *recall*. And to bring out this desired consummation it is not enough to send memorials and complaints to his connections and relatives in the Ministry. The Colonist ought to lay a Petition with a full detail of their [sic] intolerable grievances before the Imperial Parliament.

Is there on person with public spirit sufficient to frame such a Petition and to put it into circulation for signatures and transmission on the 15th?

The crowning insult came in its issue of 18 December which contained two portraits of Torrington and Gongalegoda Banda, the pretended King of 1848, in close juxtaposition separated by only one column of print. The pretender's confession was printed in full. This was introduced by a most sympathetic and almost flattering paragraph by the editor. Far different was the treatment given to Torrington. Beneath his portrait was a blistering personal attack in which the governor was dismissed as a "youthful Dandy" whose only claim to distinction was a not particularly distinguished ancestry — 'noble in the conventional sense of the term.'

More importantly the fund collected for the testimonial to Elliott and for the purchase of copies of the *The Colombo Observer* as compensation for the loss of custom anticipated with the boycott initiated by Torrington's supporters, was more than adequate for these purposes. The balance left over was used to defray the expenses of an agent in London (T.Y. McChristie) entrusted with the task of rousing public interest in Britain in the affairs of Ceylon especially with regard to the "rebellion" and the methods adopted by the government in its suppression.

Thus the next and most significant phase of the confrontation between Torrington and *The Colombo Observer* began with Lord Beaumont introducing a number of questions pertaining to the "rebellion" in Ceylon, and the new taxes, in the House of Lords. Elliott was soon in regular communication through McChristie with Beaumont in the House of Lords and Joseph Hume in the House of Commons. With the lifting of martial law in the Kandyan areas he was able to move freely in that region meeting people and making investigations into the activities of the military and civil authorities during the rebellion and in the period of martial law. He began building up a corpus of information to be given to Grey's critics in the House of Commons. From the beginning the connection between Elliott and McChristie was openly established and acknowledged. When T. Y. McChristie appeared as a witness, before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Ceylon the stage was set for a two-pronged onslaught on Torrington and the Ceylon administration, by Grey's critics on the Committee (and in Parliament) in Britain and by Elliott and his associates in Ceylon. During the whole course of the Committee's investigations Hume and Baillie were kept abreast of every development in Ceylon by McChristie and Elliott.

What irked Torrington most, however, was the publication in *The Colombo Observer* of the minutes of evidence and documentary material (including official memoranda, letters and despatches) some of it of a highly confidential nature, produced before the Select Committee. The publication of this material embarrassed the government in many ways: in the evidence of Wodehouse it revealed a difference of opinion in the inner circles of the administration on vital issues such as martial law; it showed the colonial administration in the light of an accused undergoing cross-examination on the basis of information supplied by its critics in Ceylon; above all it boosted the prestige of Elliott and *The Colombo Observer*, and afforded evidence of their influence.

Elliott himself emboldened by this mounted a furious campaign against the government within the colony. He began collecting signatures for a mammoth petition — in the manner of the Chartists — calling for the recall of Torrington and Tennent, and for a re-consideration of the Road Ordinance. The attempt to revive the opposition to the Road Ordinance followed upon Torrington's repeal and modification of the other controversial taxes of 1848, in November 1848. *The Colombo Observer* had greeted this modification and repeal, with a leading article entitled "Hurrah for Repeal,"⁴⁵ which read as follows:

Our readers who have watched our efforts in causing the voice of the people to be listened to by our Rulers, whether they have sympathised with our sentiments or not will understand the feelings of gratification with which we make the announcement which appears about the concessions wrung from Government by the unmistakable exhibition of the people's will. The triumph is not slight looking at the bare facts, but it becomes great when we consider the principles recognised, the precedent established and the monstrous consequences involved.⁴⁶

At every stage Torrington was outmanoeuvred by Elliott. In the aftermath of the "rebellion" it was widely rumoured that Torrington planned to have Elliott deported. He may well have attempted this if martial law had been declared in the Colombo district. Fortunately for Elliott it was not. There was also the prospect of a prosecution for criminal libel, but pugnacious and venturesome as *The Colombo Observer* had been, it had always observed the strict limits of the law of libel. The Queen's Advocate, H. C. Selby, did not see anything in the material published in *The Colombo Observer* that would justify a prosecution for criminal libel. Thus very early it was demonstrated that Torrington was powerless to check Elliott's insouciant campaign of opposition; he gave vent to his bitterness at this in his private correspondence with Grey. Infuriated at the personal attacks on him in *The Colombo Observer*, Torrington could only appeal to Grey — as he did in his letter of 15 September 1848 — to "..... do something to check him ...". "Unless this fellow [Elliott] is put down," he declared "he will do more mischief..." The appeal to Grey to do something to check Elliott took on a greater urgency once the "rebellion" in Ceylon became a matter of Parliamentary discussion and part of the radicals' campaign against Grey. Torrington pointed out that Elliott was "the instructor of Beaumont and Hume," and that he was striving "...in every way to embarrass the Government of Ceylon." He charged him with moving about the Kandyan Provinces with John Selby the lawyer brother of the Queen's Advocate, doing all in his power to make the people uneasy. "My opinion is that the uneasiness in the Kandyan province is provided by Dr. Elliott and his friends. They wish Parliament to suppose the country is discontented and that nothing but their views will enable the colony to be

45. *The Colombo Observer*, 7 November 1848.

46. There was also a campaign conducted by Elliott, to bring back the prisoners who had been transported to Malacca.

properly ruled..." Characteristically Torrington spoiled the effect of this charge by combining with it a completely irrelevant remark and one totally unbecoming of a Governor of a colony. "Dr. Elliott is a Baptist," he added, "and in Colonies this sect always takes part in disturbances — his agents are Baptists. If you remember, the Baptists got up an insurrection at Jamaica some years ago—" As a result of this indiscreet comment, his plea that "something really must be done to damp the excitement created and kept alive by the newspapers..." lost much of its force. Nor did it make Grey any more responsive than in the past to the hint that Torrington be granted the power of deporting undesirable Europeans from the island.

But there was still some action that Torrington could take on his own. In June 1849 he turned down a request from Elliott that he be permitted to hold a public meeting at Borella to petition the Queen to recall the Governor, and to have the Road Ordinance abrogated. The Executive Council endorsed Torrington's view that such open-air meetings were "contrary to law and cannot be sanctioned" but that petitions would be forwarded. This, at least was a drawn encounter. Elliott turned his energies to the preparation of two addresses to Parliament. In the Chartist fashion these contained a mass of signatures, 30,000 in one, and 37,000 in another. The government sought to thwart him in this enterprise by using pressure to get signatories in many places to withdraw their signatures. And Torrington's supporters came up with evidence to show — again, a parody of the Chartist petition — that many signatures were forgeries. Whether the signatures were forged by over-enthusiastic supporters of Elliott, or by his enemies to cause him embarrassment was not made clear.

Grey was becoming increasingly perturbed at the manner in which Torrington had permitted himself to be riled by Elliott and his newspaper. In a letter of 24 November he gave him sage advice:

you attach too much importance to Dr. Elliott's influence with the natives; no doubt he produces much disagreeable excitement at the moment — but I don't believe that this will break out into disturbance — if it does crush it at once and arrest him if you can make out any connection between his proceedings and the outbreak. Indeed your obvious policy is to watch all he does most narrowly, to take care that even in private conversation (wh[ic]h is sure to be known) you manifest no irritation against him, but the very moment you have a case ag[ain]st him, to arrest him and bring him to trial.⁴⁷

And he added a very important postscript to the letter:

I find that I have omitted to notice your suggestion as to a power of deportation being entrusted to you — this is totally out of the question, even the East India Company has been deprived of it since 1833.⁴⁸

47. Grey MSS: Grey's private letter to Torrington, 24 November 1849 [*Letters on Ceylon*, 1965, p. 181].

48. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

But before this letter reached him, Torrington had resorted to a most indiscreet and desperate move against Elliott. He reported to Grey that:

I took upon myself on the advice of Tennent to fire a shot at Elliott which has since occupied all his time in defending without any advantage, by putting aside [sic] the charge which has since gone forth against him. Sir C. Campbell informed you that Dr. Elliott had offered to sell himself to governemnt but he had declined to purchase him. Now, as this infernal rascal has most improperly published despatches and minutes of the Executive Council which he had confidentially rec[ei]ve[d] from Mr. Mc-Christie so I allowed Mr. Ackland's paper here to have a copy of Sir C. Campbell's despatch and published it as if received from England. The effect was wonderful. Dr. Elliott nearly *died of it* his sub-editor said, the character of the paper was ruined here and in India, and his time has ever since been taken up with *defending himself*.⁴⁹

Grey was aghast at this clumsy and disingenuous move, and categorically refused to give it his support, though as usual, he was somewhat soft in the tone of his rebuke to Torrington.⁵⁰

If you had openly and avowedly published [Campbell's despatch] I sh[oul]d have no objection to the step,

he told Torrington,

by the mode of publishing it I fear you have got yourself into a serious difficulty — By allowing it to be published as having been received from England you of course led Dr. Elliott to write to me in the manner he has done, and it is impossible that I c[oul]d send a different answer from that wh[ic]h you will receive in a despatch by this mail — I c[oul]d not possibly help disavowing on the part both of myself and of this office, having had anything to do with furnishing the despatch to the paper in wh[ic]h it was published. The inference is clear. The despatch c[oul]d only have been communicated from you or from the Ceylon Gov[ernmen]t to the Editor. Therefore it will be at once perceived that you must have given it and have allowed it to be published with an *untrue* statement as to the source whence it was derived. I have no doubt that the enquiry as to how it got out will be followed up and the real facts ascertained much to the injury of your gov[ernmen]t since no gov[ernmen]t can be convicted of any underhand proceedings without much discredit. I am sure you w[oul]d never have had recourse to such proceedings if you had acted upon your judgement and I trust this will be a lesson to you not again to be led into them by your advisers as on the present occasion.

The reproof was temperately administered. The last sentence was intended for purposes of mollification, perhaps. But to Torrington it was a loophole

49. Grey MSS: Torrington's private letter to Grey, 10 September 1849 [*ibid.*, p. 160].

50. Grey MSS: Grey's private letter to Torrington, 19 November 1849 [*ibid.*, pp. 166-67].

for an attempt to shift the responsibility to Tennent. "With respect to the confidential despatch," he informed Grey,

I must take the blame, but I must tell you Tennent had done it before he spoke to me, for when I said to him, well let us consider may I do so, he replied, why, the fact is I have done it.⁵¹

Grey would have awoken to the full gravity of the situation only with MacCarthy's letter to him on 13 December 1849.⁵²

I am very glad to find that you had remonstrated with him on that insane step of publishing the confidential despatch about Dr. Elliott.

MacCarthy stated:

I protested warmly against it at the time, tho[ugh] my protest was of course unavailing as it could only be made after the fact. I knew nothing of it until I saw the despatch in the newspaper. It would be bad and low enough to resort to such weapons at any time. But what makes the case worse to my mind is that I disbelieve the truth of the charge against Dr. Elliott, and even doubt whether Sir Colin Campbell believed or intended to bring it forward. My chief reason for disbelieving the original charge itself is more from my observation of the character of the man. He is vain, violent and conceited and I daresay as unscrupulous in the choice and direction of his weapons as most political partisans of his class. But I do not think he is systematically corrupt and venal or that he would be guilty of such a piece of superfluous baseness as to offer to sell himself to a bluff old soldier.

Torrington sought desperately to avoid publicly acknowledging responsibility for this *faux pas* but Grey was not to be deflected from the decision that he had reached that Torrington "must in some way or another take the responsibility of [himself] of the proceeding..." Thus despite Grey's insistence Torrington was determined to avoid this last at all costs. In the circumstances of the situation that faced him in Ceylon, it would have made his position even more ridiculous and difficult than it was. He succeeded in his endeavour to avoid taking the responsibility on himself, thanks to McCarthy's shrewd management, and because Elliott himself did not consider it important enough to pursue the matter when he had so much else in hand in his campaign against Torrington.

Torrington's relations with his senior officials in Ceylon had always been characterised by impetuosity, and by hasty, impulsive judgements on the

51. Grey MSS: Torrington's private letter to Grey, 5 January 1850 [*ibid.*, p. 190].

52. Grey MSS: MacCarthy's private letter to Grey, 13 January 1850, K. M. de Silva, ed., "The Private Correspondence of the Third Earl Grey and C. J. MacCarthy (Auditor-General of Ceylon, 1847-1850), 26 March 1947 - 24 October 1850," *JRAS. C.B.*, vol. 10. (1967) pp. 68-69.

relative merits of the men with whom he needed to work most closely. When his administration commenced he was suspicious and wary of Tennent, and hostile to P. E. Wodehouse. On C. J. McCarthy alone Torrington's views were from the beginning consistently favourable. Perhaps this was because of McCarthy's influence at Whitehall, for he — like Torrington himself — was Grey's appointee. Shortly after his arrival in Ceylon McCarthy married the daughter of Benjamin Hawes, Grey's Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office. (In like manner, the hostility to Tennent persistently expressed in Torrington's private letters to Grey might have stemmed partly at least from Torrington's personal knowledge of Grey's dislike and mistrust of Tennent).

By the beginning of 1848 he was friendlier towards Tennent, to whom he had given strong support in the verandahs dispute, but there was no sign yet of genuine warmth, cordiality or mutual trust in the relationship between the governor and his chief adviser. On the other hand he was, by this time, much more cordial towards Wodehouse, whose ability and resourcefulness he more than once acknowledged. When Wodehouse left for England on leave early in 1849, Torrington in a private letter to Grey, asserted that: "I have a high opinion of Mr. Wodehouse as an honourable gentleman..." He told Grey that Wodehouse's "undoubted ability and his ample knowledge of this colony will enable you to acquire from him any information which either my letters or my despatches have failed in furnishing you with ...," and went on to add that "... Mr. Wodehouse's evidence will be very valuable before the Committee of the House of Commons..."

All this changed with the arrival in Ceylon, and publication in *The Colombo Observer*, of the minutes of Wodehouse's evidence given before the Parliamentary Committee in June–July 1849. Wodehouse defended most aspects of Torrington's record of administration, though his evidence cast doubts on some of it. These latter — the imposition of martial law, and its continuation long after the effective suppression of the "rebellion;" and the taxes of 1847/48 — were of crucial importance. Torrington was greatly offended by Wodehouse's evidence on these especially because it appeared to contradict Wodehouse's own official position on them, recorded in minutes and memoranda in 1847/48.

By November 1849 Torrington's relations with Wodehouse had deteriorated to the point where he returned a letter from Wodehouse "unopened in a blank cover..." "I could not acknowledge such a man," he told Grey.⁵³ This gesture of contempt (and hostility) had followed an attempt made by Torrington to make an issue of some indiscreet financial transactions of Wodehouse's. "... I have to state to you" Torrington reported to Grey,

that Mr. Wodehouse's pecuniary affairs have latterly become notorious here, I know no reason why I should conceal such facts from you. He is in debt to the Savings Bank and Loans Board of which his father-in-law

53. *Ibid.*, Torrington's private letter to Grey, 15 November 1849 [*Letters on Ceylon*, 1965, p. 183].

and himself are trustees... But worst of all he is in debt to his own subordinates, to his shroff who has the charge of the Revenue collections under him...

...In the East India Company Service," Torrington added hopefully, "such conduct [would lead to] instant dismissal...⁵⁴

A charge of bribery against Wodehouse completed Torrington's retaliatory barrage against a man whose praises he was singing so unrestrainedly just a few months earlier.

I have written a confidential despatch to you on certain charges preferred on affidavits against that person [Wodehouse] for receiving bribes from Government arrack-renters, and also a full account of his transactions with his shroff previous to his leaving Colombo...⁵⁵

Thus Torrington had developed an almost pathological hatred for Wodehouse who became the victim of an unscrupulous campaign of slander and vituperation directed by the governor himself. His correspondence with Grey was now filled with vituperation against Wodehouse and repeated attempts to belittle his achievements as an administrator.

More importantly, the bursts of ill-temper which had always clouded his judgement began to affect his self-confidence as well. From the time he began his vendetta against Wodehouse his moods changed from hour to hour, from petulance, to rage and despair with an occasional reversion to arrogant self-righteousness, on to a whimpering note of self-pity.

His letter to Grey of 18 September 1849 written with Wodehouse's evidence very much in mind affords a revealing glimpse of these changing moods. He began with the charge that

...the Ceylon Committee has not been to inquire into Ceylon affairs except in so far as to bring immense charges against me, all of which are easily put aside ... [but] the cruel bitter persecution is almost more than I can bear....

From this he slipped to a more defiant tone, to a declaration that the defence of the Ceylon government was being prepared with cool competence. Hawes had asked him about any weak points in his case: "I am not conscious of any weak points," Torrington asserted, "nor have I anything to conceal."

Then almost at once the mood changed again.

...My difficulty has been that my adversaries tell cool, deliberate lies which of course I cannot know as I am unprepared for. Jump at these lies and listen without attention to the truth is the practice of the Committee...

54. *Ibid.*, Torrington's private letter to Grey, 9 October 1849, [*ibid.*, pp. 174-75].

55. *Ibid.*, Torrington's private letter to Grey, 12 December 1848 [*ibid.*, p. 187].

My defence shall be calm and as statesmanlike as you would desire but all the rascality of this place must be brought to light and if anything is wrong you and I are not to blame, but those who preceded us. I write in haste for I am worried to death and this is a busy day.

The letter ended in a tone of complete despair.

...there seems such an anxious determination to criminate (sic) and persecute me, that however successful I may be, I have no chance. I have done my duty and regret nothing and feel the part taken in public against me is even worse than that followed by poor Admiral Byng. I sincerely hope if I am to be ruined I may meet the same fate for life would be worthless as a ruined, broken man ...

There was a more hopeful note in his letter of 9 October where he informed Grey that:

The mass of papers which will go by this mail...are well worthy of your attention and consideration... We are all of opinion that a more complete set of official documents contradicting not by assertions, but by recorded facts, every charge against me, were never put together.

But the tone of self-pity crept through.

My honour, nay I may almost say, my life is in your hands—I have been basely slandered, and subjected for a long time to every species of persecution. I expect *no justice* from the House of Commons, but I claim it at your hands, under whom I have faithfully and honestly served. I ask you to dismiss from your mind all reports that have been widely instilled into your mind and have, I fancy, lost me a portion of your confidence—read my papers and I state with confidence, you will be even more than satisfied. Not a fact is wanting, not a lie that is not satisfactorily contradicted, not a proof is wanting as to the soundness of my case or the propriety of my conduct. The more I have read and considered the evidence the more *bitter* my feelings. The mendacity of the statements are[sic] beyond all belief. How could I reply to things which I have never heard or thought of? But I think it will open your eyes to the danger of allowing a Governor of a distant colony to be subjected to the reckless statements of disappointed individuals.⁵⁶

The optimism was only momentary. Gloom and despair were the normal moods, and the despair often drove him into fits of uncontrolled temper directed at his critics in London and in Ceylon. McCarthy writing on 13 December 1849,⁵⁷ stated that:

...certain it is that [Torrington's] personal unpopularity is great. I wish I could add that it is undeserved. But I must say (as I am speaking, as

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 167–68.

57. Grey MSS: MacCarthy's private letter to Grey, 13 December 1849, *Grey-MacCarthy Correspondence*, 1967, pp. 60–61.

I feel I ought to speak, in all confidence and unreserve) that a great change has come over him of late. There is a hysterical violence in his manner, a weakness and waywardness in all his moods, that really makes me tremble at times for his sanity. His language in places, publick [*sic*] and private, is indiscreet to the last degree.

Mac Carthy placed part of the blame for this unhappy situation on Tennent.

"All these heats," he declared, "are of course in a great degree due to Tennent who is always fermenting them and keeping them warm..." The outbreak of rebellion had made it imperative for Torrington to develop a more harmonious working relationship with Tennent who, on his part, had given him loyal support during—and after—the "rebellion." "Nevertheless there was still a basic lack of confidence and trust towards Tennent despite the dramatic improvement in their relations in the wake of Torrington's revived and intensified hostility to Wodehouse. More than ever before Torrington was now compelled to rely on Tennent. When Tennent set out for London on leave in December 1849 he went with the specific purpose of defending Torrington and the Ceylon government before the Parliamentary Committee. Through him Torrington sent "*the whole of the papers for [Torrington's] defence.*" In a letter of 5 January 1850 he told Grey: "As to the House of Commons. I have sent you all the information I possess and with Sir J. E[merson] T[ennent] I must stand or fall ..." But even at this stage, despite the realisation that his fate was tied up with Tennent his attitude to the latter continued to be curiously ambivalent. Thus on March 2 1850 he wrote to Grey that

No public man has been more unfortunately situated with regard to his Col[onial] Sec[retary]. I think there is little doubt that every sort of trouble can be laid at his door... I am nearly ruined in public life by the treachery of Sir J. E. T. ... it will be a great thing if *he does not return.*

It has been shown earlier in this essay that Torrington had no scruples about shifting the blame on to Tennent when the surreptitious publication of Campbell's confidential despatch on Elliott had evoked a rebuke from Grey.

Grey was not impressed by Torrington's new-found, if still somewhat brittle trust and confidence in Tennent. When he learnt that Tennent was coming over to England to give evidence before the Committee he had no hesitation at all in telling Torrington that he did not "think this at all desirable." But Torrington was far too committed to this new line of action to abandon it at this stage. Grey's opposition to Tennent as a witness before the Parliamentary Committee was an instinctive rejection of a person of whom he was consistently suspicious.

It was MacCarthy who provided the real arguments against the course of action Torrington had determined upon in sending Tennent, in all but name,

as his representative before the Committee. In a letter of 13 December 1849 MacCarthy declared that:⁵⁸

...the evidence before the Committee of last session has come out and not the least of the evils entailed upon us by that Committee has been the total postponement of all other functions of Government here to the one care of amassing materials for defence. This task the gov[ernor] has entrusted entirely to Sir James Tennent who goes to England by this mail in possession of all the documents and all the information that have been collected within the last three months. Now I have seen your Lordship's letter to Lord T[orrington] dissuading and disapproving of his coming. I put no trust in his discretion. I am even doubtful of his good faith.

If MacCarthy was rather hard on Tennent here, he was wonderfully accurate in his assessment of the potential damage that Tennent's evidence could do to Torrington and Grey.

"I dissent altogether," he asserted, "from the opinions which I believe he means to express as to the Civil Service here, and I dread the effect on the Committee, on the H[ouse] of Commons and on the publick [sic] opinion in England of the bitter personal hostility which I fear he cannot help expressing towards Mr. Wodehouse and other gentlemen in the course of his examination. As to abstract questions of policy such as the propriety of Martial Law, the financial measures of Gov[ernment] etc., his evidence will I think be good. He has got his materials well together and I have no doubt he will state them well."

"My great fear," he added, "is that Tennent will not be either a safe or an authoritative witness. And I don't know how he will stand any sharp cross-examination. I have therefore been adverse all along to his going to England just now, tho[ugh] by no means anxious to keep him here. If he could only be stopped half-way, if Abbas Pasha would only make him a Knight of the Golden Crocodile or whatever be the Egyptian order of chivalry and get him to write a report on the Pyramids, it would be better, I think both for you and for us. However, during the last few months he has obtained a great and by no means salutary ascendancy over Lord T[orrington]'s mind and it has been only by open and direct remonstrance on my part that I have succeeded, if I have succeeded, in preventing his being sent ostensibly by Lord T[orrington] as *his* witness. More than one despatch in that sense I have seen already drafted and succeeded in suppressing..."

MacCarthy picked with amazing foresight the crucial point of danger in Tennent's evidence, the latter's desire

58. Grey MSS: MacCarthy's private letter of 13 December 1849, *Grey-MacCarthy Correspondence*, 1967, pp. 58-61.

to run a-muck at the old Civil Service, and especially at Mr. Wodehouse. a course [which was] eminently injudicious, if he is to be looked on in any sense (and in some sense he will be) as the organ of Lord T[orrington] and of the Gov[ernment]...

And he deplored the manner in which the enmity to Wodehouse had broken out, and Tennent's role in this. He reported to Grey that Torrington

has been inoculated with it and... very injudiciously [has] lent himself to Tennent's manoeuvres in the matter [of] Wodehouse's private money [transactions]... I told [Torrington] frankly that I could not approve of it for that whatever be the intrinsick [sic] merits of the case, this was not the time to stir it up... I had heard that Tennent was busy getting up informations among the natives with some view prejudicial to Wodehouse, but did not know the details. I must therefore postpone my judgement. But in the meantime I would observe that the natives are but too apt to fashion their information according to the supposed wishes of their questioners, especially if that questioner be a man in authority...

Grey was somewhat disturbed at this increasing evidence of smouldering tempers and widening rifts within the higher reaches of the Ceylon administration. Realising that part of the problem lay in Torrington's indulging in "utterly groundless suspicions [upon] slight motives..." he urged him to "get rid of this habit and show confidence ... in all those who are engaged with you in the public service until they are proved undeserving of it..."⁵⁹ "[You] appear to be in a state of far too much excitement about the attacks made upon you..."⁶⁰ he told Torrington. "If we were equally thinskinnd what would become of us? As for me there are 3 or 4 newspapers whose principal business it seems to be to make out that there is no meanness or dishonesty I am not constantly committing." "I wish you w[ould] always remember," he added "that a gov[ernor] of a Colony gains infinite strength (like the Gov[ernment] at home) by conducting every correspondence with the most rigid attention to official forms, and with a judicial gravity and calmness."⁶¹

At the same time he made it abundantly clear that he would not support Torrington in his ill-advised and intemperate attacks on Wodehouse.

"[A] fair difference of opinion from the Gov[ernor] is no ground for condemning a person in an important office even tho[ugh] the gover[nor]'s may be considered the right view of the dispute..."⁶²

He reiterated this a fortnight later (23 January 1850) after he had seen Wodehouse's evidence himself:

59. Grey MSS: Grey's private letter to Torrington, 19 December 1849, in *Letters on Ceylon* 1965, p. 193.

60. *Ibid.*, Grey's private letter to Torrington, 24 November 1849.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, Grey's private letter to Torrington, 7 January 1850. The view was reiterated in another letter, 23 January, *ibid.*, p. 195.

...I am more than ever at a loss to understand the bitterness wh[ic]h you display against him — there is nothing in it calculated in the least to injure you, nor is there anything hostile to you in his tone.”⁶³

To Tennent, on the other hand, Grey continued to be inflexibly hostile: ...I cannot help repeating what I have before mentioned, that he is a person of whom I have a very great distrust. He is clever no doubt, but, I think, very deficient not only in judgement but in something still more essential for a person in whom confidence can be placed...”⁶⁴

Grey’s criticism of Torrington, at this stage, were never acerbic or even very sharp in tone. Indeed there was always an avuncular note in his comments, like a fond and long-suffering uncle advising an incorrigible blunderer, and keeping up his spirits: “Only keep yourself cool, play your game cautiously but never [neglect] an advantage that your opponents give you, and have no doubt the Comm[itt]ee will end in their confusion and your triumph...”⁶⁵

This article will be concluded in Volume 5 : 2 (July 1974).

63. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

64. Grey’s private letter to Torrington, 24 November 1849, *ibid.*, pp. 180–82.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 181.