

The Socialists and the Nationalist Movement in Sri Lanka 1931 - 1948 : II

(ctd. from Rōhaṇa I)

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Meanwhile, the government took steps, to promulgate the necessary rules under the Defence (Miscellaneous) Regulations. These rules conferred on the Governor, the Officers of State, the Military and the Police a tremendous amount of power nullifying civil liberties enjoyed by the people and their representatives. The powers given under the Donoughmore constitution were getting evaporated.¹

Meanwhile, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, who appeared to have had a clear understanding of the traditional forces at work in society, had formed the Sinhala Maha Sabha in order to give a new impetus to them. Dressed in the traditional national costume and abdicating Christianity, he mobilized the forces of traditional culture elements. While the Samasamajists were struggling for political and economic emancipation from imperialist control, the Sinhala Maha Sabha sought solutions rooted more securely in the traditional cultural and religious patterns of the people.

A section of the Ceylon National Congress also collaborated with the political programme of the Sinhala Maha Sabha which was based on religio-linguistic nationalism. Though the Samasamajists at their Youth League stage had stressed much on the traditional cultural heritage, by now they had begun to lay more stress on the political and economic problems. Therefore, while the Samasamaja struggle became more than a political liberation movement, the Sinhala Maha Sabha struggle took the form of a Sinhalese Buddhist revivalist movement. As a result every attempt at a precise definition of the political programme of the latter provoked charges of communalism.² However, since Bandaranaike belonged to a Mudaliyar family, and was a member of the Board of Ministers as well, he commanded the support and sympathy of the bureaucracy as well as of the dying feudal elements. The Samasamaja leaders, however, did not have those advantages. They had to depend on the political enlightenment of the masses and of the working class in particular and were totally against any form of feudal bondage.

1. *Hansard*, 31st October 1939, p. 4394

2. K. M. de Silva, *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon*, Vol. 3. p. 519

Capitalism in Sri Lanka was gaining ground amidst a decaying feudal background where the bourgeoisie was anxiously sharing the benefits in collaboration with the imperialists. Therefore, the bourgeoisie was against mass movements or any armed struggle which formed the popular line of the Samasamajists. They were satisfied with a share of power under a cabinet form of government and were aiming at peaceful co-existence. They watched the situation in India and, while expressing their strengthening loyalty to the British, preferred to ask for independence only when India had achieved it.³ Taking advantage of the socio-religious forces they exerted a certain amount of fear among the villagers and the rural folk against a revolutionary political theory. Furthermore, socialism was interpreted as an attempt to confiscate the property of the rich and to distribute it equally amongst the poor.

Meanwhile changes were taking place in the bourgeoisie camp. E. W. Perera, the leader of the Liberal League and the more radical bourgeoisie group, was defeated at the election in 1936. Sir D. B. Jayatilake who was closely connected with the traditional cultural forces was overshadowed by D. S. Senanayake, an able leader of the emerging socio-economic forces and also a good and reliable friend of the imperialists. He appeared to be a saviour of the agrarian masses.

Meanwhile, rapid changes were taking place in international politics. Joseph Stalin's alliance at first with Hitler and later with Britain posed an ideological challenge to the Socialists all over the world.

Trotsky rejected Stalin's alliance with the anti-communist countries of Western Europe and advocated an independent anti-imperialist strategy anticipating an outbreak of a new world war, and advised his followers to organize the working class for such a situation. Trotsky also advised the workers of India to denounce the British authority and to carry on their struggle for National Independence. He denounced the "Peoples Fronts" and identified them as class collaboration.

The Samasamajists were closely watching the international developments including the Moscow Trials and the Popular Front Line of the Communist parties of the West and the activities of the Third International. Meanwhile Trotsky's 'Revolution Betrayed' too came out of the press in its English translation. In this context the Samasamajists sought an early clarification of their stand in international politics. Accordingly, the following resolution was presented and adopted by the Executive Committee of the Samasamaja Party in the latter part of 1939, 20 voting for the resolution and 5 against.

3. *Hansard*, 8th November 1945, pp. 6992 ff.

“Since the Third International has not acted in the interest of the International revolutionary working class movement, while expressing its solidarity with the Soviet Union, the first workers’ state, the Lanka Samasamaja Party declared that it had no faith in the Third International.”⁴

The fourth annual conference of the Samasamaja Party was held in 1939 with these happenings in the background and the party adopted a new programme and a constitution, which it considered sufficiently strong to work in the event of war and the reaction of the imperialists. By the new constitution the membership was bound to follow a strict code of conduct on the programme of the Fourth International founded by Trotsky in 1936. The membership was limited to those who took an active part in the political activities of the party with a regular membership fee, and a vigorous campaign was launched to strengthen the party branches (locals) and the trade unions.

However, within a short time the conflict between the Trotskyites and the pro-Russian Marxists in the party became evident. The Pro-Russian Marxists tried to force the party to move closer to Russian ideology, by group discussions and the issue of leaflets and booklets. Charges were brought against those who violated the rules and regulations of the party, and at the conclusion of the evidence a group of prominent party workers including Dr. S. A. Wickramasinghe and M. G. Mendis were expelled from the party.⁵

The group that was expelled later formed themselves into the Colombo Workers Club and later into the United Socialist Party with the aim of building up a wide popular revolutionary movement for national liberation in solidarity with the Soviet Union.⁶ They declared that the Samasamajists were a Party of petty bourgeois intellectuals, the local variety of counter-revolutionary Trotskyism and the enemy of the working class, the Soviet Union and the cause of socialism.⁷ To put across their ideological stand they issued pamphlets occasionally and brought out two papers named “Janashaktiya”⁸ and the “United Socialists”⁹ in the Sinhala and English media, respectively.

4. *A Short History of the Lanka Samasamaja Party*, p. 15

5. *Samasamajaya*, 26th April 1940

6. *United Socialist*, 29th October 1940

7. *United Socialist*, 12th November 1940

8. *The Janashaktiya* was started on 17th May 1940

9. *The United Socialist* was started on 29th October 1940

Meanwhile the imperial government was getting ready to curb the socialist movement. The rules framed under Defence Regulations were gazetted, and all necessary arrangements were made and understanding reached with the bourgeois leaders to arrest Dr. N. M. Perera, Dr. Colvin R. de Silva, Phillip Gunawardane, Edmund Samarakkody and Leslie Goonawardane. Except Leslie Goonawardane who avoided arrest, the others were detained on the 18th and 19th June 1940, the party press was banned and regulations were promulgated making open party work impossible for the Samasamajists. Yet the Samasamajists continued to be active because they had anticipated this and had made arrangements for the cover organization of the party to continue the struggle begun by the leaders. But when the Samasamajists organized the counter attack the police was used to curb the activities and several leaders were imprisoned and heavy punishments were enforced.

The ideological gap between the pro-Russian Marxists and the Trotskyites widened further with the outbreak of German-Russian hostilities in June 1941. The pro-Russians thereafter aligned themselves with the British and extended their support to win the "People's War", and later joined the Ceylon National Congress too.

The detention of the leaders and the proscribing of the Samasamaja Party gave the pro-Russian Marxist group a valuable opportunity to break into the working class movement. At the climax of the World War II, the pro-Russian Marxists formed themselves into the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, and started organizing the workers. With the support of the bourgeois organizations, they acted as arbitrators in labour disputes and gained popularity among the workers.

The war and the repressive legislation which accompanied it, were successful in temporarily thwarting the growing consciousness of the working class. But the cover organization of the Samasamajists were in operation which created dissensions here and there among the labour organizations.

Meanwhile the war activities in the East changed dramatically with the fall of Singapore, the British naval base in the East, on the 15th February 1942, which was followed by the fall of Burma and Indonesia. Ceylon became more important with its natural rubber supply and the Trincomalee naval base. The imperial government, therefore, seeing the danger in Samasamajist activities sent Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, with clearly defined military and civil powers almost of a dictatorial character

and a War Council was established on 13th March 1942 with the Governor, the Commander-in-Chief, the Ministers, the service commander, and the Civil Defence Commissioner. Almost immediately the Lanka Samasamaja Party was proscribed.

Meanwhile, the Samasamajist leaders escaped and managed to enter India and they ventured to foster revolutionary activities in India. Preparatory work for the formation of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India having been attended to earlier by some Samasamajists in collaboration with the Indian Socialists, a party was formed in April 1942, affiliated to the Fourth International to which Lanka Samasamaja Party was linked.¹⁰ This decision to shift their main activities to India and to conduct a joint struggle against the British Empire however did not bring about the anticipated results as the socialist group was overshadowed in the Indian national struggle by the more popular Indian National Congress. In the course of this struggle ideological differences emerged within the party, and consequently the party split and the militancy generated at the beginning dampened resulting in a dramatic set back to the left movement in Sri Lanka.

The repression was intensified after the jail-break of 1942, and a new wave of arrests took place. A joint search was made for the arrest of the escaped detainees by the Indian and Ceylon Police. Many of them were arrested and brought back and later charged and imprisoned. Dr. N. M. Perera and Phillip Gunawardane, during the course of their trials, made dramatic statements challenging the right of the authorities to prosecute them.¹¹

Though the cream of the organization was either in jail or in exile, the activities of the party never ceased. The second level or the tertiary group concentrated their activities on keeping the organized masses alert. Many dedicated their lives to this struggle. Though illegal the "Samasamajaya" was published occasionally and the "Nidahasa" publication which was not illegal appeared regularly.

In the meantime changes were taking place in the bourgeois camp as well. The Board of Ministers were pressing their demands for a constitutional change, concentrating their efforts in obtaining a Cabinet system. Besides, at the Kelaniya sessions in 1942, the Ceylon National Congress adopted as its future goal the attainment of freedom for Sri Lanka.¹²

10. *A Short History of the Lanka Samasamaja Party*, pp. 20-22.

11. See *Samasamajist*, 4th January 1946, for Phillip Gunawardane's statement and *Samasamajist*, 31st January 1946 for Dr. N. M. Perera's statement.

12. The Kelaniya sessions was the first challenge within the Congress to the policy of D. S. Senanayake, where the resolution demanding full independence was carried through. J. R. Jayewardene, a young able lawyer, moved the resolution and Dudley Senanayake, the son of D. S. Senanayake, seconded. When the resolution was carried through, D. S. Senanayake resigned from the main Congress Committee. When the Communists joined the Congress he left the Congress altogether.

In this context the famous 1943 declaration which promised a constitutional change in Sri Lanka directed towards full responsible government in all matters of internal civil administration was made by the Secretary of State. He further instructed the Board of Ministers to draw up a new constitution which would obtain the approval of three quarters of the members of the State Council. However, when the Colonial Office appointed the Soulbury Commission, the Board of Ministers objected to it and they withdrew the draft constitution and refused to collaborate with the Commission. The Ceylon National Congress condemned the attitude of the Colonial Office and called upon the country to boycott the Commission. It further demanded an immediate recognition of Ceylon's right to independence and a free constitution.¹³

The Ceylon Communist Party showed its readiness to meet the Commission. Commenting at length upon the danger of disunity it requested the Ceylon National Congress to summon an all party conference on constitutional demands.¹⁴ It declared that the boycott would not help the country to smash the stalemate. Instead it argued the boycott will obstruct the country from the urgent patriotic duty of establishing unity, strengthening defence, and solving the national crisis. It will turn the natives into passive spectators, while imperialism retains the initiative.¹⁵ Hence, instead of the boycott, the Communist Party argued that the Congress should appeal to all sections to abstain from making separate or unilateral representations to the commission.

There was also the argument put forward by a group that the existing State Council had passed its period of five years and that the opinion of the members cannot be taken as the opinion of the masses. This section called for a general election. But the Ceylon National Congress and the Communist Party argued that a general election would further aggravate the existing disunity.¹⁶ Meanwhile the active Samasamajists and their sympathisers raised occasional cries against the appointment of the Commission and its mode of collecting information.

Subsequently, the Board of Ministers decided to move in the State Council a bill, commonly known as the Free Lanka Bill, embodying the principles of the Ministers' Draft. When the bill was introduced, W. Dahanayake, the only pro-Samasamajist member then in the State Council, suggested that the Council should carry the fight to the country if the Secretary of State rejected the

13. *Forward*, 1st August 1944

14. *Forward*, 1st October 1944

15. *Forward*, 1st September 1944

16. *Ibid.*

approval of the bill.¹⁷ The bill was turned down by the Secretary of State, and a motion in protest was passed in the Council. At this discussion a request was made by W. Dahanayake and J. R. Jayewardene to take the bill before the people so as to get it reinforced and strengthened by the wishes of the people¹⁸.

Meanwhile the Commissioners went ahead with the task of collecting information through memoranda submissions and in public sessions. The bourgeoisie represented by the Ceylon National Congress, though openly expressing their dissatisfaction, appears to have had secret transactions with the Commissioners. The minorities made their representations on a communal basis while the supporters of the proscribed Samasamaja Party demanded full independence for the country through occasional publications and meetings. The Communist Party in their first congress praised the wartime action of the Board of Ministers and identified the action of the Samasamajists as a utilization of the weakness of the government to disrupt national unity.¹⁹

The Soulbury Commissioners left Sri Lanka with their findings, while in Ceylon the political awareness was gathering momentum. A section of the minorities planned to urge the government for a round table conference, but G. G. Ponnambalam - the champion of the Fifty-Fifty demand, and the European Association were against such a measure. The Communist Party protested against any compromise of the National demands, and advised the Ceylon National Congress to pioneer the formation of a United National Front to carry forward the demands for the drafting of a constitution for Sri Lanka.²⁰

Meanwhile the Secretary of State, Colonel Oliver Stanley, invited D. S. Senanayake who was in England at this time, to Whitehall for a round of talks. At the end of the discussions the British government published the White Paper of 31st October 1945 which underlined the future constitution for Sri Lanka. In the Council discussions which took place on this matter the bourgeoisie expressed their willingness to accept the new constitutional reforms, but W. Dahanayake and V. Nalliah took the stand that the people should be given an opportunity to express their opinion.²¹ However, the bourgeois leaders were ready to accept the White Paper proposals.

17. Hansard, 6th February 1945, col. 57. W. Dahanayake referred to the bill as 'a big hoax, a tremendous camouflage on the people of the country'.

18. Hansard, 18th July 1945, cols. 3325 - 3333

19. *Forward*, 1st May 1945

20. *Forward*, 27th July 1945

21. *Hansard*, 8th November 1945, cols. 6969 ff.

By this time many changes had taken place in the socio-political pattern of Sri Lankan politics. The franchise had contributed much to the political education of the masses while the imperialists as well as the local capitalists well understood the prevailing political trends. The political leadership given to the trade union movement by the Samasamajists inspired a revolutionary spirit among the workers and the groups organized for the overthrow of capitalism, the achievement of national freedom and the establishment of a socialist form of government. However, before this movement gathered sufficient popularity and became a mass movement, an all out attempt was made to curb the revolutionary spirit by placing the Samasamajists behind bars under Defence Regulations and by proscribing the activities of the Samasamaja Party. The war and the repressive legislation gave the rulers an opportunity of holding back temporarily the growing consciousness of the working class.

Immediately after the war, resentment against the sufferings and oppressions and the new lessons learned through the war-experience along with the underground activities of the Samasamajists led to the biggest upsurge in the working-class movement. The rising cost of living, the difficulties in obtaining the bare necessities of life as well as victimisation, were urging the workers to seek relief in a combined struggle through a United Workers' Front organized with the support of the Samasamajists.

While the workers were forging ahead with their constant demands the Samasamajist leaders were released along with other war detenus in accordance with a resolution moved by A. P. Jayasooriya on the 30th May, 1945. However, an effort was made to persuade them to sign conditions which were stoutly refused.²² The released detenus were hailed as heroes and were given receptions throughout the country, and the Samasamaja Party proscribed during the war emerged stronger than ever before. However, the party did not emerge as a united group as there had been ideological differences and frictions among the leaders. One section emerged as the Lanka Samasamaja Party while the other appeared as the Ceylon Branch of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India.

The Samasamajists recommenced trade union activities in co-operation with the Workers' and Peasants' Union of A. Gunasekera, which had been actively engaged in worker and peasant problems during the war. Organized workers under other leaderships were attracted towards the Samasamajists as a result of the militancy of the leadership. The government servants too were forging ahead as regards trade union activity. This alarmed the government, and an immediate increase of wages was made in December 1945.

22. *A Short History of the Lanka Samasamaja Party*, p. 23

Meanwhile the Samasamajists organized a series of protest meetings against the Soulbury-Senanayake constitutional reforms. The two sections of the Trotskyites were brought into one camp temporarily under the Left Front. They argued that the new constitution had recognized in the constitutional field the transformation of the economy of Sri Lanka into a full fledged capitalist economy. It was further argued that the bourgeoisie had obtained for themselves the maximum control over the internal administration of the island within the framework of British imperialism. In the reforms, though a two-chambered Parliament with a cabinet system of government was offered to the people of Sri Lanka, the British Government, it was held, had kept the control over Defence, External Affairs, Currency and Exchange in their hands. In times of emergency White-Hall through its Governor-General had complete power to take over the government of the country from the Ministers and to legislate for the purpose of "Preserving Law and Order" which, according to them, was for the protection of the property and the interests of the imperialists and the Lankan capitalists. They were of opinion that the Lankans were offered the chance of administering the affairs of the island in the interest of the capitalists and the imperialists. They further argued that the benefits conferred by the previous constitution under the Executive Committee System was taken away and that new checks on the advancement of the masses were being created by the device of a Senate. In the new representation system rural areas had received greater weightage than the cities and towns in order to enable the reactionary forces to continue its political domination. They pointed out sarcastically that trees and wild animals received representation at the expense of the working class and the agrarian masses.²³ The Trotskyites argued that the Ceylon bourgeoisie could not solve the post-war problems in Sri Lanka through those constitutional changes, but could postpone matters by suppressing the revolutionary movements.²⁴ Therefore they invited the masses to join hands with the organized workers to overthrow the entire machinery of the government and install a free constitution in accordance with the wishes of the people.²⁵

Besides, they took the position that socialism could not be won through parliamentarism. Hence, their representation in Parliament was intended to fight from inside the House, while organizing the extra-parliamentary mass struggle for national and social liberation.²⁶ Thus the Trotskyites condemned

23. *Samasamajist*, 31st May 1946.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Satana*, 16th November 1946

26. *Samasamajist*, 31st May 1946

and rejected the Soulbury - Senanayake reforms as reactionary, and demanded the immediate repeal of all anti-working class legislation, defence regulations against strikes and the release of all political prisoners in Sri Lanka and India.²⁷

Steps were taken by the British Government to frame a new constitution for Sri Lanka on the lines indicated in the White Paper. The draft was prepared by Sir Ivor Jennings to which Sir Barclay Nihil, the Legal Secretary, made the necessary amendments. The draft thus prepared was taken to London in January 1946 for Colonial Office approval, where Sir Barclay was joined by Sir Oliver Goonatilake, the Financial Secretary of Sri Lanka, and a good friend of D. S. Senanayake and the Board of Ministers. In these talks it was decided to draw up the constitutional document in such a way that only slight modifications would be necessary when Dominion Status was to be granted in the future. The draft constitution was ready by the end of April and it was passed by the King in Privy Council on 15 May 1946. The Order in Council 1946, which carried the new constitution, was divided into nine parts, of which three were to come into immediate force. These covered the definition of the limits of power, the delimitation of electoral districts and various transitional provisions.²⁸

Meanwhile D. S. Senanayake was busy organizing the bourgeoisie camp into a political party. He was successful in bringing the Ceylon National Congress, the Sinhala Maha Sabha, Lanka Mahajana Sabha and the Ceylon Muslim Association to join the new party which he named the United National Party. In this new organization the option was given for the members to continue in the previous political groups if they had enrolled in them before 1st January 1946. The aim of this new party was to give effect to the new constitution until the attainment of independence.

Meanwhile attempts were made to build a united front of the progressives. The Samasamajists called for a Workers' United Front while the Communist Party, which by now had disassociated itself from the Ceylon National Congress, called for a National Front.²⁹

In the trade union sector arrangements were made under the leadership of the Ceylon Federation of Labour, to demand for work or maintenance for all the workers, a basic minimum wage of Rs. 2.50 per day, the repeal of all anti-strike regulations, the release of political prisoners, etc. At public meetings the Soulbury-Senanayake constitution was condemned and rejected.

27. *Samasamajist*, 4th January 1946

28. Sir Charles Jeffries, *Ceylon - the Path to Independence*, 1962, pp. 107 - 112

29. *Samasamajist*, 31st March 1946

Trade union demands were placed before the government and arrangements were made for a strike. A central Strike Committee was formed under the Ceylon Federation of Labour, and mammoth meetings were held, reiterating their just and legitimate rights. However, negotiations broke down, and the workers walked out unit by unit from places of work leading to the first general strike of October 1946. At the end, the strike was settled on the promise of several important concessions including full trade union rights for public servants.

Though the promises were not carried out, the success of the strike enormously increased the enthusiasm of the workers. The government clerical service too joined the trade union struggle by arranging a Trade Union week to enlighten the public servants on trade unionism and political and civil liberties. At the end of the week they held a massive rally and demanded the grant of full civil, political and trade union rights to public servants.

The discontent and unrest caused by the high cost of living and the lack of ordinary civil rights for employees in both the government and the private sector led to a general strike in May-June 1947. The government wielded a strong hand and it rushed through the State Council several repressive laws, such as the Public Security Ordinance and the Police (Amendment) Ordinance giving wide powers to the police and the Governor. The workers could not withstand the organized might of the government and the employers, and the strike was called off in the third week of June after a police shooting at the procession of strikers at Kolonnawa, without a single demand being granted. Thousands of workers were victimized.

D. S. Senanayake by this time was not only successful in organizing the bourgeoisie, but in also convincing the Colonial Office to give an assurance on the award of Dominion Status. An announcement was made in the House of Commons on 18th June 1947 to the effect that, after the elections and when the necessary agreements were ready, His Majesty would confer upon Sri Lanka full responsible status within the Commonwealth of Nations. Soon after the declaration, the State Council was dissolved on 4th July 1947, and the polling was fixed from the 23rd August to the 20th September 1947.

The United National Party contested more seats than any other party, also giving the liberty to their members to contest each other. At Polonnaruwa five United National Party members stood as candidates for election. The United National Party did not have a positive programme and appealed to the voters mainly on the claim that its leader had liberated Sri Lanka from colonial rule. On the other hand the Lanka Samasamaja Party and the

Bolshevik-Leninist Party contested a total of 38 seats. They placed a programme before the voters which included the nationalisation of economic resources such as the bus service, banks, insurance companies, foreign and internal trading institutions and estates, the grant of trade union rights for government employees and the achievement of full independence to Sri Lanka.³⁰ They also declared that the claim of the bourgeois leadership of obtaining independence was a bogus claim and that colonialism was being perpetuated under a new form. The Communist Party presented it manifesto which included a programme for the nationalisation of economic resources and the equal distribution of production among the masses with full civil liberty.³¹ The Ceylon Tamil Congress, the Ceylon Indian Congress, the Labour Party, the Lanka Swaraj Party and the United Lanka Congress too contested the election.

The polling was dispersed for a period of nearly one month commencing with the rural areas where the Marxists' influence was weak. The bourgeoisie mobilized the feudal elements and attacked the Samasamajists as the enemies of religion. Huge posters showing temples, churches or mosques on fire carrying the caption "Save the country from the Samasamaja fire", were openly exhibited in public places. The support of the clergy, headmen, businessmen, bus magnates and planters who dominated the uneducated masses in the rural areas was extended to the bourgeoisie. Thuggery and brutal force was used in certain electorates and sometimes the polling agents were kidnapped.³² In some electorates there was clear evidence to prove that large sections of the voters were prevented from recording their votes by threats of actual violence and force.³³

A noticeable feature of the campaign was the enthusiastic manner in which the workers who participated in the General strike threw themselves into the election struggle. The very defeat of their economic struggle appeared to have driven them to seek a political solution to their problems.

The United National Party emerged as the strongest party with forty two seats out of ninety five. Since most of the independent members were anti-socialists, the United National Party leader D. S. Senanayake was well placed, with the British eagerly waiting to support him. The Lanka Samasamaja Party won ten seats while the Bolsheviks won five. The Communist Party won three seats while two independents joined the Communist Party. The Tamil Congress won seven seats, the Indian Congress six seats and the Labour Party managed to win only one seat. There were nineteen independent members.

30. *Samasamajaya*, 10th October 1947

31. *Forward*, 1st August 1947

32. *Ceylon Daily News*, 13th September 1947

33. See Matugama Election position records of 1947, C. NA. 81/2644

Seats in the coastal belt from Wellawatta to Hambantota and those of the Kelani Valley passed en bloc to the Marxists, while the majority of seats on the Central Province and Uva went to the Ceylon Indian Congress. The Northern and Eastern Provinces voted for the Ceylon Tamil Congress.³⁴

As soon as the election was over, the Governor called upon D. S. Senanayake to form a Cabinet. With the support of a few Independents and the Labour Party Senanayake formed a Cabinet of fourteen members. During the period in which this confederation was being pieced together an attempt was made to unite the independents with the socialists to form the cabinet and a series of discussions took place at H. Sri Nissanka's

34. Analysis of the election results in 1947 on a Party-Provincial basis:

<i>Province</i>	<i>Total No. of Seats</i>	<i>UNP.</i>	<i>LSSP.</i>	<i>BLP.</i>	<i>CP.</i>	<i>TC.</i>	<i>IC.</i>	<i>LP.</i>	<i>Independent</i>
Western ...	20	10	4	3	1	—	—	1	1
Central ...	15	6	—	—	—	—	5	—	4
Southern ...	12	5	1	1	4	—	—	—	1
Northern ...	9	—	—	—	—	6	—	—	3
Eastern ...	7	3	—	—	—	1	—	—	3
N. Western ...	10	5	1	—	—	—	—	—	4
N. Central ...	5	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sabaragamuwa ...	10	6	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Uva ...	7	2	—	1	—	—	1	—	3
TOTAL ...	95	42	10	5	5	7	6	1	19
Vote polled ...	97.4	38.9	10.7	5.9	4.8	4.3	3.8	2	27

The balance of 2.6% consists of 2.3% spoilt ballot papers and 0.3% polled by the United Lanka Congress and Swaraj Party.

Progress of voting 1947

<i>Name of the Party</i>	<i>No. of Candidates</i>	<i>No. of Seats Won</i>	<i>Total No. of votes received</i>
United National Party ...	98	42	751,432
Lanka Samasamaja Party ...	28	10	204,020
Ceylon Tamil Congress ...	9	7	82,499
Ceylon Indian Congress ...	7	6	72,230
Bolshevik Leninist Party ...	10	5	113,193
Communist Party ...	13	3	70,331
Labour Party ...	9	1	38,932
Lanka Swaraj Party ...	3	—	1,393
United Lanka Congress ...	2	1	3,953
Independent ...	182	19	543,389
Total polled			1,881,372
Total no. of votes			3,052,814

house — “Yamuna”. However, as most of the Independents were pro-capitalists the attempt was not fruitful. The independent members joined the government one by one and the revolutionary Bolsheviks declared that to defeat the Senanayake government one had to depend on the development of forces outside the Parliament rather than on attempting to recognise and mobilize the forces within it. They therefore declared that the parliamentary struggle has to be more consciously linked with the extra-parliamentary struggle.³⁵ For that a well knit Samasamaja, Bolshevik and Communist Party united front in Parliament with active support from the trade unions was considered vital for devising a method and a technique to ensure the acceleration of the extra parliamentary struggle.³⁶ This plan, however, failed to materialise.

Meanwhile D. S. Senanayake signed the Defence Agreement with the British Government without consulting Parliament, and arrangements were made for the transfer of power. Elaborate arrangements were made to celebrate Independence on a grand scale. Celebrations, festivities and processions were organized all over the country.

On the other hand the Samasamajists and the Communists regarded the “Independence” as incomplete. They held that the Bill had not conferred national independence or raised Ceylon to the status of a free sovereign state.³⁷ While the burning problems remained untouched it was false, they said, to invite the people to rejoice. They pointed out that while unemployment was on the increase, inflation continued unabated and hunger and misery were spreading over the land.

Colvin R. de Silva, the leader of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, in an article written to the ‘Fight’ under the title “What independence, for whom?”³⁸ made a clear analysis of the main provisions of the Independence Act. He argued that through the Soulbury Constitution British imperialism sought to install representatives of the capitalist class in Sri Lanka permanently in office as against the masses while the new venture sought formally and officially to hand over to that class the monopolistic agency for protecting the British interests in Sri Lanka. To him this was consistent with the Labour Government’s policy of reconstructing imperialist relations and the bestowal of an indirect rule. Therefore, he remarked, “Ceylon is thus not free

35. *Fight*, 12 December 1947

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Samasamajist*, 10th February 1948, *Forward*, 5th February 1948

38. *Fight*, 21st November 1947

but continues to be in chains. Only now our imprisoned nation had a new and locally recruited warden... Mr. Senanayake is but the Head Jailor of the British Imperialist Prison House".³⁹ He advised the nation to develop a powerful struggle for the rejection of the agreements and the overthrow of the signatories, the reactionary cabinet system, the equally reactionary second chamber, the delimitation system which entrenched the social forces and the clique that ruled the country. The liquidation of the Soulbury regime was, therefore, considered essential to win the fight for real freedom. He alerted the nation to agitate for a Constituent Assembly summoned by a body independent of the imperialist regime on the basis of a direct and secret universal suffrage to frame a free constitution for Sri Lanka.⁴⁰

On 4th February 1948, amidst organized mass rejoicing throughout the island, the new Governor-General was sworn in, and the Lion Flag fluttered at full mast side by side with the Union Jack, over the House of Representatives building, and on the 10th February 1948 the ceremony of the opening of the new Parliament was held at the Independence Square. The Duke of Gloucester, as the representative of the King, addressed the Members of Parliament, which the Bolsheviks and the Communists boycotted as an act of political protest against an entrenched constitution in the name of independence.⁴¹

From the period of the implementation of the Donoughmore reforms the rise of mass movement against British imperialism has been rapid and phenomenal. The class struggle began to develop more vigorously and the Lankan capitalist class became more class-conscious and counter-revolutionary. The capitalist class, in seeking a place in the camp of the British imperialists, served them willingly and obediently during the war. They cooperated with the imperialists to suppress the revolutionary organizations. Due to this collaboration their power increased. The Colonial Office extended the life of the council as the bourgeoisie was so loyal and faithful to the imperialists. At the conclusion of the war they expected a change in their relationships. The White Paper based on the Senanayake-Colonial Office discussions cleared the way for consolidation of the political alliance. The general election results gave them an added opportunity to seek assistance for their mutual safety. Therefore the British transferred the power to a more faithful clique on an entrenched constitution in 1948, and allowed the "Brown Englishmen" to safeguard their interest and also to control the revolutionary nationalist movements.

39. *Fight*, 21st November 1947

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Times of Ceylon*, 9th February 1948