

repression, internment and now



Colombo conceals hundreds of rebel deaths

By IAN WARD in Colombo
CEYLONSE Government authorities are concealing alarming facts about the deaths of young Chinese, Indians, and innocent civilians.

The Government flatly denies that numerous "confirmed" rebels have been executed by the Army and police since the rebellion broke out on April 5. Yet evidence to the contrary is irrefutable.

Nothing is said of the countless "old scores" that have been settled, the majority resulting from village feuds erupting into bloodshed. Additionally, a large number of the youthful rebels have been killed in mop-up operations conducted by security forces in the Anuradapura, Kegalle and Galle districts.

Pointedly, the Government has released no official casualty figures. Instead, it has issued a statement that the rebels are still active in the hills.

The Government has also issued a statement that the rebels are still active in the hills. This statement is a clear attempt to mislead the public and hide the true extent of the rebellion's impact on the civilian population.

As I argued in "The Price of Blood", the Government's silence on the deaths of rebels is a deliberate attempt to conceal the true cost of the military's operations.

On Saturday afternoon I came upon one of the most grisly sights I have seen in three weeks of reporting this rebellion. In a small, dark room, a body was lying on a stretcher, its face pale and its eyes closed. The room was filled with the smell of blood and the sound of sobbing.

Bodies are hung in to the hole along with dried, broken-up backs and palm leaves. The scene is a stark reminder of the human cost of the conflict.

1m BENGALIS FLEE TO INDIA

By DAVID LORBAK

MORE than a million refugees have fled from East Pakistan (Bangladesh) according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr B. B. Mendel.

The influx of refugees has risen sharply during the past week, with the total number of organized resistance in the West and South of Bangladesh.

The Court of Appeal held that the offence of conspiracy was committed when the agreement was made between the defendants to import goods contrary to section 4(1) of the Customs Act, 1957.

Millions live too far from the frontiers to get out of East Pakistan and there will include many of the worst starvation cases.

In addition to the million refugees registered by the United Nations, there are many more who have fled to India and towns of eastern India.

There is no estimate of how many such people there are but in several places they are given rise to social tension by placing undue on citizens of the host countries.

Conspiracy abroad triable in Ceylon

Director of Public Prosecutions
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Earthquake bomb raid

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sub-machine gun vehicles on the line arms supplying fighting out.

PRICE ON Sney engine

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BULLETIN NO.5

Editorial

CEYLON TODAY: UNDER A PERMANENT STATE OF EMERGENCY AND "LEGALISED" REPRESSION.

For two years, the island of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) has been ruled under Emergency regulations. Using the pretext of an alleged "attack" on the United States Embassy in Colombo by a completely unheard-of group, the Government led by Mrs. Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (with the LSSP and the Moscow-orientated Communist Party minor partners in the Coalition), declared a State of Emergency on March 16th, 1971.

The Minister of Communications made a public declaration at the time, saying that the Emergency had been declared "with the whole-hearted support of the Cabinet" and that "necessary powers" had been given to the Armed Forces "to wipe out disruptive elements and maintain law and order".

These "necessary powers" were used in fact, not only to wipe out (literally, through brutal mass murder) something like 20,000 young people, but also to round up over 16,000 people, mostly youth incarcerating them in prison camps without charge, without access to legal aid or representation, without trial, for an indefinite period. This process, which began straight after the declaration of the Emergency, under cover of which an open witch-hunt was launched by the police against any persons adhering to the popular and well-known youth movement known as the J.V.P. (People's Liberation Front) this process is still going on today. Arrests of "suspects" continue, new "rehabilitation" camps (of a new kind involving forced labour) are in preparation.

Concentration camps were created on a long-term basis, to keep youthful discontents away from the arena of political struggle and mass organisation. Their "rehabilitation" has consisted of internment, of the kind suffered by the Catholic masses in British Army-occupied Northern Ireland. The majority of these political prisoners have been interned for very nearly two years, those lucky enough, that is, to survive the sudden wave of sadistic terrorist murder at the hands of prison military guards. A considerable number of these detainees have "disappeared" without trace. Cries and shots have been heard, on specifically named occasions, by villagers living near these camps. The conditions inside are appalling; no proper sanitation, medical treatment for diseases (some of which were contracted under detention, stemming from malnutrition etc.) is virtually unavailable, the prisoners are frequently subjected to various forms of physical and mental cruelty. Such information comes from letters smuggled out of the camps themselves.

Lord Avebury, who visited Ceylon on behalf of Amnesty International, to examine conditions in the camps and the plight of the political prisoners, was refused access to any of these camps.

The Emergency regulations are still in operation today; various of these (for instance, the detention without trial of "suspects"

on the "evidence" of police accusations or of "Confessions" made under harrassment, interrogation and torture, by the suspect) are now incorporated into the permanent law of the land: Criminal Justice Commissions Act and the Interpretation (Amendments) Act of April 1972. The latter provides for the denial of the right to apply for a writ of habeas corpus, whilst the former could be invoked by the Government to deal with any situation ranging from an armed insurrection to a general strike, to a limited and localised strike or mass demonstration. It gives the government powers to set up special courts, reminiscent of Hitler's "people's Courts" having the power to hold secret trials (from which the Press and the public can be excluded) and accepting as "admissible evidence" in the form of confessions made by a prisoner "to whomsoever and in whatsoever circumstances". Such legislation is designed to stifle what little "independence" the judiciary had under normal bourgeois constitutional law, and to eliminate all constitutional law, and to eliminate all constitutional opposition to the Government.

The Press Council Bill, passed last month, February 22nd, 1973, and now a permanent law, makes it illegal to report anything in the Press which the Government considers prejudicial of the Government's policies and real intentions as to be capable of arousing or mobilising mass discontent and opposition.

The Essential Services Order, operating under Emergency regulations, makes it illegal for certain service sectors of the trade union movement to go on strike for any reason. In practice, this order has been applied to all sectors virtually without exception. In this way the Government has been able to effectively impose a freezing of wages, through intimidating the organised labour movement, whilst permitting prices to rise continually, unchecked. The Technical Officers in the Ministry of Irrigation, Power and Highways defied the Essential Services Order in the summer and went on strike for several weeks. They were followed by the Bank workers who stayed out even longer, with moral and financial support from many other unions. Due however to the effective isolation of their struggles, the weakness of other sectors, the relative strength of the Government-backed unions and the effectiveness of the press censorship (distortion of the facts and deliberately biased reporting) and of the generalised repression, these militant sectors were unable to sustain their resistance indefinitely and were finally forced back to work. Many, as a result, lost their jobs and are probably now blacklisted.

Democratic rights and normal civil liberties won in struggle under bourgeois democracy and including those "guaranteed" under the bourgeois constitution, are completely suppressed in Ceylon today. Public meetings, distribution of leaflets and handbills are illegal without police approval. The purpose of the long-term prolongation of these Emergency regulations is, not only to remove the hard-won rights and strictly limited legal independence of the organised labour movement, but also to subject these organisations to the strict control of the State, imposing harsh and crippling

punishments on those who disregard these regulations, who carry on, in other words, their fight for better working and living conditions and a living wage against price increases and continual cuts in social expenditure, thus asserting their independence in the face of the repressive machinery mobilised by the bourgeois State. This in turn is to enable the Government to carry out, without hindrance from those affected, its unpopular anti-working class social and economic measures made necessary by the need of the private capitalist concerns (whether domestic or foreign-owned) which own and control most of the country's wealth, to maintain their profits, and by the need of the State to attract further foreign investments.

Also, the Government's dependence on loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in order to finance its balance of trade deficit and its foreign exchange crisis (international debts running into millions of Rupees) renders it necessary for such a capitalist-controlled Government to exact enormous sacrifices from the ordinary people. Thus the working class, in the ports and inland towns, on the tea and rubber plantations, in the countryside villages, also the unemployed, the housewives, students, the old, the children, the sick, the homeless, all have to pay the price in economic and social deprivation in unalleviated suffering, all this from a Government which declared itself pledged to the Socialist transformation of the country. Their democratic rights to complain, to meet and discuss and to resist in an organised way are removed by a Government which in May 1972 gave itself another seven years in office.

We say - **END THE STATE OF EMERGENCY NOW!**
RELEASE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS NOW, UNCONDITIONALLY!
REMOVE ALL POWERS UNDER SPECIAL REGULATIONS!
REPEAL ALL REPRESSIVE LEGISLATION, including CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMISSIONS ACT!
RESTORE ALL DEMOCRATIC, TRADE UNION and POLITICAL RIGHTS!

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NEWS FROM CEYLON

New Developments in the mass opposition movement against repression.

Following the fairly successful island-wide Hunger Strike that took place on October 18th 1972, the Human and Democratic Rights Organisation (HADRO) in Ceylon and the other working class organisations are sponsoring a mass petition signature campaign.

We understand that this petition centres around five main demands:

- I)- Stop import of arms; cut the expenditure on police and armed forces rather than extracting more money from the people by increasing the prices of essential commodities.
Provide the second measure of rice on the ration as well as sugar, flour and other essential commodities at prices that the masses can afford to pay, and restore the free measure of rice to all wage earners who have been deprived of it.
- II)- End the Emergency; repeal all repressive laws.
- III)- Stop arbitrary arrests and imprisonment and prevent torture of arrested persons. Release all political prisoners.
- IV)- Compensate all persons who have suffered injury or loss of property.
- V)- Restore the fundamental right of workers to strike.

The Ceylon Mercantile Union, one of the biggest unions supporting the ongoing campaign against repression, and led by Bala Tampoe, its General Secretary, held a meeting in Hyde Park, Colombo, on March 5th, at which it publicised the demands of the petition campaign.

The purpose of the recent Hunger Strike and the present petition Campaign is not only to raise these demands among the mass of the people, giving a voice to the widespread disaffection and fury at the increasingly extensive repressive measures enacted by the present Government, but also to develop a mass awareness in Ceylon of the extent of dissent and opposition to the Government, its policies and practices, and to make the facts of the repression and the opposition to it known to the world at large.

It is important that as much publicity as possible be given to these developments by those organisations and groups of people in a position to do so, not only here in Britain but in other countries, particularly the Imperialist countries in which wide-spread use of the mass media is still possible, and where the left and revolutionary press still have the means to publish developments in the international class struggle.

News about political prisoners (or "detainees").

Ceylon Daily News 18/I/73 reported that in December 1972, 3,600 "detainees" sat their GCE 'O' Levels. This testifies

not only to the extreme youth of most of the detainees, but also to the fact that there are very many more prisoners than a few thousand so often referred to. Figures as to the number of political "detainees" seem to vary enormously, and whilst the Government occasionally announces the official number of detainees "released" on any given occasion, since the number of arrests, re-arrests and detentions that are still going on are not publicised and legal provision is made for arrests and detentions to be hushed up (Emergency regulations) it is useless to go by the official "statistics" which are misleading.

Special centres were set up for the purpose of the GCE exams and "some suspects who had been released stayed on to sit the exams in the camps". After all, where else would they be able to sit exams? They must be feeling overwhelmingly grateful to the Government for such an unsolicited and generous gesture. Perhaps the Government's generosity went further; perhaps it even provided the preparatory course material and careers advice to the "suspects" as well.

Prison Camps.

Women prisoners: The Ceylon Daily News 18/1/73 reported that the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Sports (!) had announced the day before that the MIRIGAMA centre (Rehabilitation centre) for women had been closed and handed back to the Social Services Department.

Polonnaruwa camp (Polonnaruwa Royal College) he announced, would be closed in February 1973 and the buildings given back to the Education Department.

A large proportion of the prison camps have been converted out of colleges, university campuses and public building complexes, with certain effects, no doubt, on the quantity and quality of the recent student intake.

Forced labour camps on the agenda?

The district rehabilitation committee of the GA, Badulla, and the Prisons and Rehabilitation Department are making arrangements to OPEN a "rehabilitation centre" at MAHIYANGANA for detainees "interested in agriculture". It will bring 700 acres under cultivation this year, according to the Ceylon Daily News 18/3/73.

It cannot be assumed, judging from this report, that because one camp is closed (e.g. the Mirigama Centre for women) this means its inmates have been or are to be released. They may simply be transferred to one of these new types of camps (like MAHIYANGANA) and used as dirt-cheap labour. This obviously would take some of the load off the "Social Services" bill in terms of what it takes to "rehabilitate" young people. This may also be intended to have a demoralising and defusing effect on the vast sector of unemployed, possible sources of employment being denied to them by the Government's use of "slave" labour.

The setting up of new camps of this nature, is clearly intended to maintain internment without trial (and without charge for many)

and impose forced labour to break the spirit of resistance of the people, especially the youth.

At the rate the present "trials" are proceeding it is also clear that the internment of "suspects" is going to continue for some considerable time if Mrs. Bandaranaike's Government has its way.

Some informative news items from Ceylon Press.

Ceylon Daily News, 5th January 1973, contained a small item announcing that Sri Lanka was to host the 25th Anniversary meeting of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights! (no comment....) which is to be held "about the middle of this year". This is intended to take place at the newly-inaugurated Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall in Colombo; all Asian United Nations member nations are expected to send a large number of delegates.

Ceylon Daily News, 18th January 1973, contained an item on the Ceylon-U.K., Eire Conference. This organisation, has announced that a 15% surcharge is to be levied as from 29/1/73 on all cargo loaded at Ceylon ports for the U.K., this new charge to be borne by the consignees. This, it appears, has been necessitated due to deteriorating port condition in the U.K. following the September dock strike. Since the strike, there has been a "shortage of labour" at the port of Liverpool.

Over 90% of the cargo carried by the Ceylon Shipping Corporation and chartered vessels are destined for Liverpool.

The Ceylon Shipping Corporation's "Lanka Rani" berthed at Liverpool on November 17th and could not leave till January. The "Lanka Devi" berthed at Avenmouth on December 17th but had to wait 2 weeks before beginning to discharge her cargo.

Last year the Ceylon Shipping Corporation made a net profit of over Rs.2.8 million mainly on liner services to the U.K./Continent. However, it is now anticipated that the Ceylon/U.K. Liner service may operate at a loss and may have to subsidise the service with earnings from other liner services to the Far East, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf Ports.

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**THE NEW EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
(SRI LANKA STYLE).**

GAGGING OF THE PRESS - THE PRESS COUNCIL

On February 22nd the National State Assembly in Ceylon passed the Press Council Bill by 112 votes to nil the entire opposition having walked out of the chamber in protest.

Since the Bill was introduced towards the end of last year by the Minister of Justice, Mr. Felix Dias Bandaranaike, opposition to it was expressed by wide sectors of the people through their political, trade-union and civil-rights organisations and through the press itself. Internationally, the world's press gave publicity to the Bill and expressed grave misgivings on its provisions. The President of the Commonwealth Press Union stated, "...we are bound to say that this proposed body could not be a Press Council Bill as we understand the term concerned with press freedom and press standards rather than the policies of successive governments".

Appeals were lodged with the Constitutional Court, against the Bill on a number of its provisions. It was argued that some items were inconsistent with fundamental "freedoms" guaranteed by the Constitution itself. But nobody in Ceylon expected this court to rule against the government and uphold the objections. Yet, the government was not going to take any chances. The Parliamentary Group of the United Front Government manoeuvred, not very subtly, to circumvent any unfavourable decision of the Constitutional Court. It decided to rush the Bill through the Assembly in all its stages, using the government's two-thirds majority.

The Sri Lanka Republican Constitution solemnly declares that sovereignty lies with the People. The National State Assembly is defined as the legislative power of the people. Thus it can be interpreted that the People are brought into the discussion of a Bill through the legislative process. In this instance the People, for their part, sought the advice of the Constitutional Court - a direct creation by the Constitution itself, and the Government answered by threatening to ignore any decisions of that Court. Such is the facade of democracy in Ceylon. This Government which prolonged its life by seven years, merely through the instrument of the new Constitution (passed in 1972) and not through the will of the people, is methodically obstructing the participation of the people in the affairs of the nation. In our analysis, which was published in Bulletin No.3, of how this Government was intending to use the new Constitution we concluded that it would use it as a democratic shroud to cover a host of anti-democratic and anti-working class policies. It has already legislated for massive repression and its own entrenchment.

The newspaper industry in Ceylon is among the best in Asia. It publishes 15 daily papers with a circulation of over half a million copies a day in a population of less than 13 million. In addition, Ceylon has several weekend papers and many weekly and monthly publications.

The Press Council Bill, now law, states as its objects:

- Section 7 - 1)- To ensure the freedom of the Press in Ceylon.
2)- To prevent the abuse of the freedom of the Press in Ceylon.
3)- To safeguard the character of the Ceylon Press in accordance with the highest professional standards.

The Council will consist of five members all nominated by the Government.

- Section 3 - 1)a. The Council shall consist of the Director of Information.
b. Four other nominees appointed by the Prime Minister.
2)- One of the four government nominees will be the Chairman.

The Council will take directives from the Minister of Information and will have powers to summon witnesses and compel them to produce information and documents which it may require.

Section 10- For the purpose of performing its functions the Press Council may:

- 1)- Require the proprietor, printer, publisher, editor or journalist of any newspaper to furnish to the Council such information in such matters as may be necessary.

Section 11- For the purpose of any enquiry held by the Press Council under this law, the Council shall have all the powers of a District Court to:

- a. Summon and compel the attendance of any person.
b. Compel the production of any documents.

In this way it has powers to institute contempt proceedings for "disrespect of its authority". Newspapers can be ordered to correct and apologise for anything published which, in the opinion of the Council is "untrue, distorted or improper".

- Section 15- Every person who publishes or causes the publication in any newspaper of:
- a. Any profane matter
 - b. Any statement or matter concerning a person which will amount to defamation within the meaning of Section 479 of the Penal Code;
 - c. Any advertisement which is calculated to injure public morality;
 - d. Any indecent or obscene statement or matter, shall be guilty of an offence and shall upon conviction be liable to be punished by a term of imprisonment not exceeding two years or a fine not exceeding 5000 rupees, or both.

Offences such as the above could, ordinarily, be dealt with by the normal criminal law. But, what is noteworthy is that

the ordinary Criminal Courts are relatively independent of the political body while the Press Council is neither independent nor representative. In October, last year, an official communique stated that the Press Council "cannot be independent of the Government whose policy it has to execute". In this situation, the Government or individual members of it can set themselves up as being above the people as, in fact, all bourgeois states do, and be indiscriminate arbiters of all political criticism and opposition. The law specifically excludes any control of activities of the Government or its executives.

Newspapers are forbidden to publish, apart from normal Official Secrets, reports of any Cabinet proceedings or impending Government action on exchange control, import control, monetary or fiscal measures.

Section 16- No person shall publish or cause to be published in any newspaper:

- a. The contents or part of the contents of any document sent to all or any Minister by the Secretary to the Cabinet of Ministers;
- b. The proceedings or part of the proceedings of a meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers;
- c. A decision or any part of a decision of the Cabinet of Ministers;
- d. Any proposal or any other matter which is alleged to be under consideration by any Minister of the Government.

The above offences carry a punishment of a maximum of two years imprisonment of 5000 rupees or both.

The Government's care for the Press Council is that the press in Ceylon is monopolistic - three firms control the largest newspapers. However, it can be seen that it is these very papers which, by and large, support the government. Seldom do they confront the government with major criticism. Indeed, on the matter of the Press Council, they have argued that a certain fundamental control of the Press is to be desired and welcomed. The major newspaper owners know the context of the Press Council Law and the host of others recently enacted such as the Criminal Justice Commissions Act, Exchange Control Laws, Passport and Exit Permits act, the Interpretation (Amendments) Act which can remove any, even technical, independence of the judiciary and to enable the government to crush all political opposition, of a class character, at will. The United Front, under the leadership of Mrs. Bandaranaike has not moved, in any way, against its political opponents from the right, such as the United National Party. The Prime Minister in moving the resolution for the adoption of the new Constitution, on 19th March 1972, at the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly, said, "Our Constitution must promote the realisation of the aspirations of the People of Sri Lanka to establish a socialist society in this country. On the other hand, it has struck ruthlessly at its opponents from the left. It has made it impossible for trade-unions to function normally. Strikes are made illegal, picketing banned, distribution of trade-union literature even faintly critical of the Government brings down the heavy arm of the

of the machinery of State upon those responsible. Many thousands of people are incarcerated in jails, without trial, for the last two years. It has massacred the JVP which represented wide sectors of the people. The major Press barons know that the Press Council Law is aimed at the revolutionary press, to prevent any democratic participation of the working class in the affairs of the Nation, by winning victories through struggle, and the proper conduct of its struggle against the government and the interests it represents. There is an identity of interest in the policies that the UNP and the United Front pursue. They stand to maintain the bourgeois state and imperialist systems of relations. The dependence on imperialism is intensified. As a direct result, the economy of the country continues to deteriorate. In answer to demands by International finance the standard of living of the workers is eroded, continually. To serve the same demands the United-Front Government, as promised, seeks to maintain a political "normality" in the country. This it does, methodically, by inserting emergency Laws into the permanent Statute Book.

The President of the Court of Appeal, at its inaugural session on 19th March 1972 observed correctly when he stated: "Mr Attorney....we are also encouraged by the presence of distinguished members of the executive and the legislature because the administration of justice has always been an important part of governmental duty and -if this draft of the proposed Constitution (passed in May '72) has correctly outlined the shape of things to come - judges are shortly to exercise not a separate power as recently understood but only part of the power of the future National Assembly".

All the laws mentioned earlier are not merely emergency regulations made permanent law but each is given a new "Competent Authority" outside the normal judicial system. No appeal is allowed against the decisions of the "Competent Authority". So it is in the decisions of the Press Council.

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TREATMENT OF POLITICAL DETAINEES - A LETTER FROM PRISON

We print extracts from a letter sent by a group of women prisoners who were arrested during the Ceylon Government's repression of the Janata Vimukhti Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Front) in April 1971. The letter was smuggled out in September 1972 and was translated from Sinhala into English by a member of the CSC in London.

Living conditions of the detainees was appalling:

"From dawn to dusk and dusk to dawn we were locked inside and even the windows were closed. Speaking aloud as well as laughing was prohibited. We were let out to queue for food and only then could we even drink water."

"To bathe we had to use dirty water left by other prisoners..."

"Our food was brought in large, dirty buckets. It was mixed with rust...Sometimes there were maggots in the rice..."

"We had to sleep in discomfort, packed together and sweating in the heat".

Not surprisingly, the women frequently fell ill, but medical attention was negligible.

"In the dispensary there were three bottles of medicine and a few tablets of Dispirin and vitamins. For every ailment these were prescribed...When a doctor did arrive, he would fail to examine the patients;..."

The women thus detained were clearly far from being political activists, in fact they must have come from backgrounds where attitudes appearing to us conservative prevailed:

"...We were abused in filthy language.."

"One day two prostitutes were brought into our hall.. All of us objected to their admission"

In several parts of the letter there are shocked reactions to the language and attitudes they were subject to.

But the prisoners were spirited enough to make complaints, with the result that the food was served in clean buckets. It was some time after being taken into custody that they were allowed to write letters to relatives and then the contents were limited.

Some women were removed to a camp at Mirigama.

"Those transferred were chosen arbitrarily by the officers,..sisters, daughters mothers were separated from one another. This caused much inconvenience to their relatives who were later allowed to visit, and added to their anxiety"

At Mirigama, disunity among the prisoners was created:

"..the officers persuaded some girls to become informers and to do menial work for them...by promising these girls an early release. As a result disunity developed, and the officials took the opportunity to institute tyrannical regulations"

Those who dared to protest were terrorised, while the informers "received special Treatment".

The sanitary conditions were particularly bad:
"The toilets have been blocked now for over four months, and in the whole camp there are only four. The stench is unbearable.."

Severe rules were applied to visits:
"...if (parents') visiting card is lost or forgotten, parents are not allowed to see their children, even if they have journeyed from afar...even then, the food they brought was refused".

Torture was frequently practised on those arrested, and the population was so terrorised that they feared to aid the victims of repression, even when these were children; for fear of police reprisals:

"(some of the)...women were raped and molested in the presence of their children. Letters were branded on the arm of one of them and her son was shot dead in her presence. After taking this mother and her eldest daughter into custody the police set fire to their house. The woman's youngest son and daughter, aged 10 and 14 respectively, fled and hid in the woods. When they returned to the village in the evening, they were chased out of every house".

At Wittambuwa police station, girls wearing military uniforms were stripped of their clothes and received serious injuries as the result of torture by the police:

"Another sister was arrested and molested at the Pannala police station; her clothes were torn off and she was beaten. When she was interrogated she was allowed to wear only her underpants and burns were inflicted on her. Two men who were arrested with her were badly beaten..."

They were handed over to the Negombo police:
"Police jumped on the woman and trampled her; her fingers were twisted and fractured. The men accompanying her were stabbed and then their hands were cut off, after which petrol was poured over them and they were burned alive".

Other police stations mentioned in the letter are Weligama, and Anuradhapura, where at that time about 25 people had been killed, and at Deraniyagala an 11 year-old girl was kicked and beaten to gain information.

Few women escaped assault and rape, and many were forced to witness the torture of others in custody.

At the Special Branch Station, the screams and battered bodies horrified the women:

"In such circumstances innocent girls like us become confused and speechless". Threats and violence were used to get the required answers to questions: "Whatever the police required was recorded in English(I) and we were forced to sign irrelevant and inappropriate things to protect our lives, and chastity". That was how statements were recorded on the Fourth Floor."(2)

The letter ends:
"We swear that the account we have given is true and accurate.
For lack of space we cannot write many other things."

Notes: (1) The prisoners would probably not understand English.
(2) Reputed to be the torture chamber of the secret
Police in Ceylon.

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(A summary of a lecture given to the Ceylon Solidarity
Campaign Forum meeting in January 1973.)

A BRIEF ESSAY
ON THE HISTORY OF CEYLON FROM A MARXIST VIEWPOINT

Early Sinhalese society was peculiar in that it grew up around large centralised irrigation works set up, and to some extent, controlled by the state. The situation was altogether different in India, where the irrigation system was traditionally based on small scale village tanks until the coming of the British with their modern engineering techniques in the late nineteenth century. This makes Srilanka an interesting case where the thesis of 'Oriental Despotism' put forward by some Marxists can be tested. The original examples were wholly from China and they apparently showed that the need to mobilise huge quantities of labour for 'hydraulic' works led to the creation of despotisms of a royal or priestly type. A close study of ancient Srilanka, which has been done in a recent volume of 'Past & Present' shows that this was not the case and that private property in land and water rights existed owned either by the king, the nobility or the church in the shape of individual monasteries. In other words the pattern was not so very different from that of mediaeval Europe while the political institutions resembled those of South India. The two greatest irrigation systems seem to be the core of, and coincidental with, the two successive capital cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. If the cause of the different evolutions of Srilanka and Western European feudalisms is sought it is probably to be found in the relative independence of the latter's cities rather than in the differing types of agricultural production.

By the time the Portugese arrived in 1505, the main irrigation works, producing as they did commodities for the direct consumption of the local ruling classes, had broken down and the states that did exist, Jaffna, Kotte, Kandy and Avissawella, were based on local village-well irrigation of rainfall agriculture. Neither the Portugese nor, initially the Dutch changed the situation at all, for eventhough Ceylon was integrated into the new Mercantile capitalist economy by virtue of its exports of Cinnamon, the spice was produced by means of service, that is to say feudal tenures, from the forests, where it grew wild. One is reminded of the tribute of furs laid on primitive Siberian tribes by the Cossacks in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries which themselves derived from similar tributes on the Finns and Slavs taken by the Khazar nomads in the eighth century. In so far as exchanges took place they did so between the king of Kandy in the interior and the Dutch. The king of course appropriated his

cinnamon from his people and then imported luxury goods with it. However equal the exchanges may or may not have been between the King and the Dutch they were pretty unequal as regards the King and his subjects, in fact they were entirely one-way. The Dutch and Portuguese rulers could easily govern what portions they wanted as corvees of the local labour built them fortifications which they armed with guns, the product of early capitalist technology while sea-power, also a product of that society, isolated the locals from such useful but dangerous playthings. As long as the revenue from the cinnamon was greater than the expense of the local garrison and the sea-power they could happily remain without changing things a great deal and they did, altogether, for about a quarter of a millenium. There were some cultural imports from Europe the most important being Catholicism and Romano-Dutch law. Even these changes in law and land tenure did not alter things a great deal either for it became easier for small land owners to produce for the market the local towns, trading centres for international trade, provided really quite small aggregations of possible customers. However the quickening of economic advance in Europe after 1750 did start to change things. Previously the demand for cinnamon, based as it was on the consumption of tiny ruling classes was very inelastic in the economists terms, that is to say that any expansion of production and therefore sales resulted, because the quantity demanded did not change much, when the price was lowered, in lower not higher total revenue for the provider of the spice. As this changed with the growth of a much larger middle class in Europe the Dutch governors were stimulated into trying to increase production by changing the forces and thereby the relations of production. In present day economic terms by changing the technology of production they changed the production relations between the classes. They experimented with cinnamon plantations using wage labour and this proved to be of great importance because the whole economic history of Sri Lanka since then has been one of the successive rise of plantation crops destined for export markets. The initial result of this was merely to provoke the King of Kandy into a war.

However more important events were occurring in the centres of the capitalist world than in the rather somnolent and petty colonial atmosphere of Colombo. In the winter of 1794 the armies of the new French Republic crossed the frozen Thine, overthrowing the old Dutch state and creating a "Batavian" republic. By 1796 Dutch Ceylon was occupied by British troops from Madras, and this was confirmed by the treaties of Amiens in 1802 and Vienna in 1815. The island had been annexed largely for strategic reasons, to prevent the establishment of a naval base of a possible European rival at Trincomalee, which would threaten the economically more important British interests in India. Once there, however, the British would attempt to mould the local society to their desire and they were soon given the opportunity.

The colonial rulers were able to take advantage of

quarrels among the Kandyan nobility in the interior to conquer the whole island. Mrs. Bandaranaike's own family was in fact the one that invited the British in. Once in control the local feudal ruling class found its privileges quickly whittled away and in 1817 there was a ferocious but hopeless rebellion. Ferocious because it was a class war, hopeless because the backward isolated nobility had no chance. According to the victors estimates, 10,000 to 15,000 men were killed in action, hanged or died in the disruption that followed the "pacification". All feudal tenures were abolished and the population disarmed. In all the measures taken against the up-country nobility the colonial power could rely on the active support of the class of low country comprador bourgeoisie and state bureaucrats, culturally assimilated to European styles.

The mere fact of rule though did not give the British what they wanted as the local population even when it had recovered from the loss of perhaps one fifth of its adult males, did not produce any commodity of value which could be traded on world markets, and which could then pay for the new effective colonial administration. The peasantry could not pay taxes, only labour services, as they had only a small surplus of foodstuffs previously appropriated by the nobility and there was no market to speak of where this small production could be realised. The old service tribute was retained, therefore, and the population in the agriculturally slack seasons had to labour at public works. These were in fact roads which played a dual role; in the first place they performed an important military job for they opened up the mountainous interior to swift penetration by troops in any future rebellion and in the second they were a means by which the island was provided with an economic infra-structure of communications which would facilitate economic penetration if production for the market could be got going. Another way of looking at it would be to say that capital was accumulated by means of non-market labour services for the overheads of the new foreign capitalist class. The Colebrook report of 1830 ushered in the new legal forms which would best help this process and almost simultaneously the first coffee plantation was started in the central highlands by Bird.

In one sense the only changes in Sri Lanka society for the next hundred years were quantitative not qualitative. Feudalism had been decisively smashed by 1830. The expansion of the plantation system, tea from 1880, rubber from the first world war and copra rather earlier, together with the importation of Tamil proletariat to work on the estates rather than employing local Sinhalese who were only available as wage labour when their peasant holdings did not need attention, all flow from the changes at the beginning of the century. The local nobility has synthesised with the comprador bourgeoisie, symbolised by Mrs. Bandaranaike herself. There can be no struggle against Feudalism, the British did that very successfully. The ruling class is a capitalist one, bound particularly closely to imperialism and the only question for socialists is how the small urban proletariat can be allied together in a political alliance with the increasingly landless peasantry and plantation labourers to smash the rotten and impoverishing system.