

SUPPLEMENT

Precis of the early Correspondence between Lord Soulbury and Mr. Suntharalingam

Mr. S. to Lord S.—20th January, 1964.

“This letter of mine may be a surprise to Your Lordship—and the enclosed documents a greater surprise. I trust Your Lordship will be able to read through the documents and favour me with Your Lordship’s candid comments and criticisms, Not for publication unless Your Lordship wishes”.

Mr. S. to Lord S.—February 24, 1964.

“I have noted with pleasure that Your Lordship will be able to study my documents on board the ship and favour me with your comments. No doubt Robert Burns’ lines about mice and men will come to Your Lordship’s mind.”

Lord S. to Mr. S.—April 23, 1964.

“I apologise for being so long over my perusal of the documents you entrusted to me.....I will study your documents and let you have my comments before long.”

Lord S. to Mr. S.—28th April, 1964.

“I enclose a few comments and criticisms on the papers you sent me and hope they may be of some use”.

Comments and Criticisms

“Dear Mr. Suntharalingam,

I have read the dozen documents in the folder which I now return to you—with much interest and also much sorrow.

During my tenure of office as Governor-General of Ceylon I never expected that there would be such a bitter cleavage between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities—and you are quite right when you say that the cause must be laid at the door of Sir John Kotalawala and his Government. But if he chastised the Tamils with whips, the late Mr. Bandaranaike chastised them with scorpions. The Sinhalese behaviour to the Tamils has been excessively short-sighted and foolish. When as Chairman of the Commission on the

reform of the Constitution of Ceylon in 1945 I studied the relations of the two communities. I was much impressed by the important contribution that the Tamils had made and were making to the economy of Ceylon—and I was aware that the Ceylon Tamils were better educated and more industrious than the Sinhalese—in many ways they were playing the part that the Scots had played and still play in the economy of England. In fact during the 18th and part of the 19th century—the English were rather jealous of the Scots—who were getting a greater share of the jobs going in England than their population warranted. The reason, I think, was that the Scots were better educated and more industrious—Northern folk often work harder than Southerners; the climate and soil compel them to do so. But the English were never so stupid as to antagonise the Scots. Had they behaved like the Sinhalese to the Tamils Britain would never have achieved a tittle of her prosperity at home or overseas in the Empire.

If at the time of the act of Union between England and Scotland at the beginning of the 18th century the English had insisted on “English only” as the language of the two nations, every Scot would have hung on to Gaelic, but the English had more sense and every Scottish Mother had her Children taught English because it was England that offered the greatest opportunity of employment.

If the Sinhalese had been as sensible, every Tamil Mother would have been anxious for her children to learn Sinhalese—for the same reason. I do not know what is now the best solution, or if there is any solution.

In the Constitution which I recommended—there seemed to me at the time to be ample safeguard for minorities—but section 29 has not been as efficacious as I had hoped — and I now wish that that I had recommended a “human rights” clause as in the Constitution of India—and elsewhere. But I do not believe that either federation or an autonomous Tamil State will work. Federation is cumbersome and difficult to operate—and an autonomous Tamil State would not be viable.

I am afraid that I can only counsel patience — and vigorous participation in the work of the House of Representatives. You might imitate the Irish party in our House of Commons before Ireland was separated from us. Incidentally the Tamil Members of Parliament were, in my opinion, very unwise not to support Dudley Senanayake. They could, I believe, have kept him in power.

The position of the Tamil workors on the estates is also very disquieting—it is deplorable that such a large body of men and women should be voteless.

I can understand the reluctance of the Sinhalese in the area of Kandy to an enfranchisement of numbers large enough to swamp the electorate. But a reasonable solution would be to create four or five seats available to Tamil voters only—no matter what part of the Island they lived in; outside, of course—the Northern and Eastern provinces.

Well—I feel very sorry for you and your Community and I wish I could provide some acceptable solution.

Were I in your shoes I would do all I could to support the U.N.P. and secure the defeat of the present Government.

(Sgd.) Soulbury.

30. 4. 64.

Mr. S. to Lord S.—May 6, 1964.

“In the covering letter Your Lordship expresses the hope that the “comments and criticisms” “may be of some use”. Certainly they would prove most useful in Ceylon today if they are published along with the annexed observations on them.....

Indeed Your Lordship’s comments and criticisms would be a valuable supplement to Your Lordship’s Foreword to Farmer’s recent book “Ceylon—A Divided Nation”— (Should the title not have been “Ceylon—A Disintegrated Nation” ?)

My Lord,

Your Lordship’s ‘Comments and Criticisms’ were most interesting.

I agree with Your Lordship (in fact, I informed the Leaders of the Federal Party at the time) that political expediency required that Dudley Senanayake should have been allowed to continue in office in 1960, if not with active Federal support, at least without hasty Federal opposition.

I notice that the only objection that Your Lordship appears to have to an Autonomous Tamil Nation State of Eelam is that it “would not be viable.” When I broached the matter with Syers (Sir Cecil) when he was High Commissioner here, he too gave expression to the same objection. I have gone into the matter very closely and I am satisfied that if Eelam is reconstituted according to the Arrowsmith Map of January, 1803, and in terms of Cleghorn’s Minute of 1799, not only would Eelam be viable but it would be more self-reliant than Sinhalam financially and economically. Indeed, as conditions are at present and likely to be in the near future the progress of the prosperity of the traditional Tamil territory in Ceylon is being deliberately retarded by surreptitious acts of the Sinhala politicians.

I am longing for the day when the Eela Tamil voter will vote against Federation and strongly for Separation. In the meanwhile, the resources of Eelam are being developed as best as could be done especially in respect of the cultivation of paddy and other food crops. It may perhaps interest Your Lordship to know that the amount of paddy produced in the Vavuniya District alone has jumped from about 50,000 bushes during 1948 to 1,250,000 bushels during 1963. If we are given a free hand we should be able to push our paddy production much further and faster.

There is ample scope for new industries but we are without adequate aid. We should be having now, with the assistance of U. S. A., a fine port at Kankesanthurai to serve the Sethu Samudhram Scheme of the Government of India but the perversity of the Sinhala politicians stands in our way.

In regard to the plantation Tamils, Your Lordship is probably aware of my attitude. There is a saying in Tamil that a “mouse not knowing which way to escape began to drag a broomstick as well”. We Eela Tamils have been, in the words of Cleghorn, ‘A Nation from very ancient times in possession of our own traditional territory. The same cannot be said of the Indian Tamils; willy-nilly as they are in Sinhala soil they have to devise their own ways and means to regain their human rights. In my view, they can do so if their Leaders would undergo some sacrifice.

I do not believe that even if Dudley Senanayake is returned to power the Eela Tamils will stand to gain. As I say in one of these Dozen Documents, the Eela Tamils must seek and secure

their own salvation; and I hope the day will come when we may expect a helping hand from Great Britain and U. S. A. in the struggle before us.

After all, we went under the British independently of the Sinhalese and frankly we feel we have been wronged by Britain in handing us over, though unwittingly, to Sinhala chauvinists who boastfully proclaim that the Sinhalese have taken the place of the British in Ceylon. We worked with the Sinhalese to win our Independence from the British but we now find that we have been foisted with bad masters in place of good.

Surely the Mother of Parliaments should not be prudish about the Statute of Westminster as not to enact suitable amending legislation. Must She not restore direct to us by Act of British Parliament the liberty which we lost direct to the Western Foreigners in the fields of battle—the last being under the British, as late as October, 1803, when the Eela Thamil Chieftain, 'PANDARA VANNIAN' finally fell?

Otherwise, I suppose Eela nationalism must tread the path taken by Irish nationalism, as Your Lordship hints, through 'Black and Tan' and Sinn Fein and De Valera's methods or take the course more recently taken by the Cypriots through E. O. K. A. and General GERVAS' methods, to wrest freedom from Sinhala Imperialism.

Vavuniya,
Ceylon.
6th May, 1964.

I remain, My Lord,
Yours sincerely,
(Sgd.) C. SUNTHARALINGAM."

Lord S. to Mr. S. — May 20, 1964.

"Many thanks for your letter of May 6, which I have been carefully considering.

I still doubt whether you can make a viable state out of Eelam. But assuming the continuance of Sinhalese 'persecution' your countrymen might be driven to separate as Ulster has separated from the Irish Republic and federate with South India. The relation of Great Britain and Ulster would not be dissimilar. I have no idea as to how you would regard such a development. but the suggestion of it

would certainly put the wind up the Sinhalese. I occasionally mentioned the possibility of it to D. S. Senanayake when I was discussing the report on Ceylon's Constitution in the Spring of 1945 and it put the wind up him.

I'm afraid that my "comments and criticisms" must be regarded as '*highly confidential*' at the moment at any rate but if Dudley ever gets into power, I would reconsider it."

Mr. S. to Lord S. — 6th July, 1964.

"My Lord,

I am sorry I could not reply earlier to Your Lordship's letter of May 20.

I shall deal with this correspondence as confidential until such time as Your Lordship grants me permission to bring them to the notice of the Public. As Your Lordship suggests, the secrets that the Ballot Boxes will hold at the next General Election will determine the future of Ceylon, for salvation or for damnation. Already the Press speaks about the non-holding of the next General Election and Dudley Senanayake starting up a revolution! I begin to wonder whether Sinhala difficulty may not be Thamil opportunity!

I am afraid the parallel of Ulster and Great Britain is not quite apt in the context of Ceylon conditions. Whatever the fears of the Sinhala Chauvinists, having regard even to the history of Pandya, Chola, Chera invasions of Ceylon, the Thamil of Eelam will not, I trust, seek the aid of South India, if at all, except after, as I hinted in Parliament, the aid of the Devil himself failed.

D. S., in his day, merely trumped up the 'bogey' of South India and North Ceylon alliance for the purpose of magnifying the Indo-Ceylon problem. Of course, S. W. R. D. B., used the 'bogey' to prevent the plantation Thamil from getting their legitimate civic rights, and holding the balance of political power in the Legislature.

I wonder whether Your Lordship has had access to the "Ceylon Daily Mirror". The paper is serialising "Eelam Grandfather's (that is my) Letters to his Grandchildren". The letters are historical in perspective, not of the nature of 'hearsay history' as some looks

rae: they are recent history of Ceylon as I have lived it. I hope to be able to send Your Lordship the first series of twenty letters as soon as their publication is completed.

I remain, My Lord.

Yours sincerely,
(Sgd.) C. SUNTHARALINGAM”.

Mr. S. to Lord S. — May 15, 1967.

“My Lord,

Your Lordship will be pleased to remember the correspondence which passed between us concerning my “Eylom: Beginnings of Freedom Struggle—Dozen Documents”.

Your Lordship’s last letter dated May 24, 1964, concluded with these words:— “My ‘Comments and Criticisms’ must be regarded as ‘highly confidential’ at the moment at any rate, but if Dudley ever gets into power I would reconsider it.”

I now write to beg Your Lordship’s permission to release me from the ban. Dudley, as Your Lordship is aware, is in the saddle for the past two years, but the ‘horse’ does not appear to give him a safe, peaceful, political ‘ride’—the reason, some of his Cabinet Ministers are riding too, hugging Dudley from behind for their own safety and twisting the animal’s tail to fool the voters.

Adversity continues to make strange bedfellows among the opposition led nominally by Sirimavo Bandaranaike; and Parliamentary Democracy after the British model which Your Lordship helped to bestow on Ceylon may become a dismal failure, to be replaced by what may possibly prove better, a Bhikkhodom of Lanka !!!

I anxiously await Your Lordship’s kind and early permission.

I remain, Your Lordship,

Yours truly,
(Sgd.) C. SUNTHARALINGAM”.

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