

THE STRATEGY OF AN ETHNIC MINORITY PARTY  
IN GOVERNMENT AND IN OPPOSITION: THE TAMIL  
FEDERAL PARTY OF SRI LANKA (1956-1970)

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategy of an ethnic minority party - the Tamil Federal Party of Sri Lanka - in government as well as in opposition (1956-70). The focus is directed towards finding answers to why that party followed such strategies and how far and to what extent it was successful in achieving its objectives.

The hypothesis of this study is that the Federal Party achieved some of its objectives because it followed strategies other than that of purely utilizing the parliamentary arena. This study seeks to point out that a party explicitly identified with an ethnic minority, unlike a normal political party seeking power, is never in a position to capture a majority in parliament or influence greatly the policies of the government through normal parliamentary channels such as voting, negotiations or by debate and discussions behind the Speaker's chair. In the circumstances it is compelled to formulate alternate strategies to enable it to achieve at any rate some of its goals.

We have in this study sought to be descriptive and analytical. Three types of evidence are used: (i) primary sources, (ii) information gathered from interviews with various party leaders, and (iii) secondary sources. The evidence gathered from all three sources are interpreted and investigated in the context of the events,

development and experiences of the past twenty years. In trying to interpret the evidence, we have endeavoured as far as possible to verify the information collected.

Since independence most of the political parties have utilized among other strategies, extra-parliamentary agitations based on Gandhian methods of non-violent resistance such as hartal, satyagraha, and civil-disobedience as a method of political protest. In the case of the Federal Party, the Gandhian methods of non-violent resistance have been its principal strategy while it was in opposition (1956-65). Its alternate strategy was to exploit its parliamentary strength in situations where governments were returned to office without stable majorities. Its role as a constituent partner in government (1965-68) was based on the latter strategy.

The information we have distilled and our analysis supports our hypothesis. Our assessment of the Federal Party's strategy and its achievements confirm our hypothesis. The evidence shows that the Federal Party was compelled to formulate alternate strategies given its permanent minority situation. The point is that it succeeded to some extent in its objectives by following those strategies.

On the basis of the evidence presented and analysed we have come to the conclusion that a minor party, especially that which represents an ethnic minority has,

under a parliamentary system, to follow alternate strategies to achieve its objectives. The alternate strategies can either take the form of extra-parliamentary agitation or it can be an exploitation of parliamentary strength in unstable situation in parliament. In our discussion on the future prospects of the Federal Party we have concluded that though the party has not achieved all its objectives, now, as a major component in a Tamil United Liberation Front, it would continue to agitate for its objectives with added strength by the selective use of extra-parliamentary methods.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| B.J.B    | Buddha Jathika Balavegaya (National Front for the Protection of Buddhism) |
| C.I.C    | Ceylon Indian Congress  |
| C.P      | (Ceylon) Communist Party  |
| C.P(P)   | (Ceylon) Communist Party (Peking-wing)                                    |
| CWC      | Ceylon Workers' Congress  |
| EBP      | Eksath Bhikku Peramuna (United Bhikku Front)                              |
| FP       | Federal Party   |
| JVP      | Jathika Vinukthi Peramuna (Sinhalese National Liberation Front)           |
| LSSP     | Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Ceylon Equal Society Party)                      |
| LSSP (R) | Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Revolutionary)                                   |
| MEP      | Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front)                          |
| SLFP     | Sri Lanka Freedom Party   |
| SLFSP    | Sri Lanka Freedom Socialist Party   |
| TC       | Tamil Congress  |
| TUF      | Tamil United Front  |
| TULF     | Tamil United Liberation Front   |
| UF       | United Front  |
| UNP      | United National Party   |
| VLSSP    | Viplavakari (Revolutionary) Lanka Sama Samaja Party                       |

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

After nearly four centuries of colonial rule, Sri Lanka (Ceylon)<sup>1</sup> emerged as an independent country in February, 1948. The peaceful transfer of power from the hands of the British to the Sri Lankan elite, the Island's established democratic institutions together with its competitive political process have earned it a reputation for being a model of constitutional evolution among the newly independent states of Asia and Africa.<sup>2</sup> Since independence, on six occasions political power has been transferred from one party or coalition to another in accordance with the wishes of the people in free and democratic elections. Democratic parliamentary institutions which the British gradually introduced and competitive political parties which have evolved in time, before and after independence, provide stability and continuity to the country's political system.

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1. With the inauguration of the new republican constitution in 1972, the name Sri Lanka was substituted for Ceylon. Sri Lanka and Ceylon as used in this study are interchangeable.

2. Calvin A. Woodward, The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969), p. 11.

However, some past as well as very recent developments in Sri Lanka indicate that it can no longer be considered the model among the new states. For example, in 1956, 1958 and in 1977, there have been serious inter-ethnic clashes between the country's two principal ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Moreover, young people organized a major insurrection against the established democratic system in April 1971.

Sri Lanka has a multi-ethnic society. The majority are Sinhalese forming 71.9% of the population.<sup>3</sup> They inhabit the south and western parts of the island as well as the interior highlands and the "dry zone" between the highlands and the northern part of the country. The Sinhalese who claim to be descendants of Aryans from North India speak a language of Aryan origin and are overwhelmingly Buddhists. The Buddhists formed 67.4% of the population in 1971.<sup>4</sup> During western colonial rule, the Sinhalese tended to divide into two groups on the basis of region - the Low-country Sinhalese and the Kandyan or upland Sinhalese. The difference is gradually eroding.

The principal minority are the Ceylon Tamils who formed 11.4% of the population in 1971.<sup>5</sup> They are

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3. Department of Census and Statistics, Census of Population 1971: Preliminary Release No. 1 (Sri Lanka: Government Press, June 1972), p. 2.

4. Ibid., p. 2

5. Ibid., p. 2.

concentrated in the Northern Province and along the east coast of the country. Another group of Tamils arrived in the nineteenth century during British rule mainly to work the coffee and later tea and rubber plantations. They are generally Indian Tamils from South India. The Indian Tamils live in the central highlands and formed 9.4% of the population in 1971.<sup>6</sup> Both the Ceylon and Indian Tamils are of Dravidian culture and speak a Dravidian language, Tamil. The majority of Tamils (Ceylon & Indian) are Hindus and formed 17.6% of the population in 1971.<sup>7</sup>

The next important minority group are the Muslims. They comprise three separate groups, the Ceylon Moors, the Indian Moors and the Malays. "Islam was first brought to Ceylon by Arab traders, and the modern Moor community claims an Arabic origin."<sup>8</sup> The Moors generally use Tamil as their home language. But Moors who reside in the Sinhalese areas speak the language of the area, namely, the Sinhalese language. A considerable section of the Ceylon Moors is concentrated in the Eastern Province and intermingle with the Ceylon Tamils there and

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6. Ibid., p. 2.

7. Ibid., p. 2.

8. Robert N. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1967), p. 14.

another on the western coast, north of Colombo. The remainder are scattered throughout the island. The Ceylon Moors were 6.5% of the population,<sup>9</sup> while the Indian Moors formed 0.2% in 1971.<sup>10</sup> The Malays, descendants of East Indian troops brought to Sri Lanka by the Dutch formed 0.3% in 1971.<sup>11</sup> The Malays mainly reside in the big cities e.g. Colombo. Religiouswise the Muslims formed 7.1% of the population.<sup>12</sup>

Finally there is another small community in Sri Lanka known as Burghers. The Burghers are a mixed race of European and Ceylonese ancestry and speak the English language. The Burghers formed 0.3% of the population in 1971<sup>13</sup> and reside predominantly in the urban areas. Almost all of them are Christians.

Christianity is not only the religion of the Burghers but also of a section of the Sinhalese and Tamils. In 1971, 6.7%<sup>14</sup> of the Sri Lankans were Roman Catholics and 0.8%<sup>15</sup> were other Christians mainly Protestants. Thus, Sri Lanka has not only a multi-ethnic society but also a multi-religious society.

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9. Department of Census and Statistics, Census of Population 1971: Preliminary Release No. 1, p. 2.

10. Ibid., p. 2.

11. Ibid., p. 2.

12. Ibid., p. 2.

13. Ibid., p. 2.

14. Ibid., p. 2.

15. Ibid., p. 2.



Before the arrival of Western Powers, in its 2000 years of history, Sri Lanka had been ruled by several kings (Sinhalese as well as Tamil) with their separate kingdoms. As A.J. Wilson noted, "at the time of the Portuguese arrival in 1505, the island comprised three kingdoms, Jaffna in the north, Maha-Nuwara or Kandy in the central highlands, and Kotte in the south-west maritime districts."<sup>16</sup> Although some of the Sinhalese kings (e.g. Parakramabahu VI) had attempted to unify the country, it was accomplished only by the British, who for the first time brought the whole island under a single administration in 1815.

During the hundred and fifty years of British rule, the country's economy, social and political system underwent drastic changes. From a predominantly feudal agricultural economy Sri Lanka was transformed into a "dual economy"<sup>17</sup> with greater emphasis on plantation agriculture based on export crops such as tea, rubber and coconut.<sup>18</sup>

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16. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973 (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1974), p. 8.

17. The term "dual economy" means, the co-existence of traditional and modern sectors in an economy. With the introduction of plantation agriculture in mid 19th century, Ceylon was transformed into a dual economy. From this period onwards the traditional peasant agriculture and the plantation agriculture have been co-existing.

18. See H.N.S. Karunatilake, Economic Development in Ceylon (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 22.

The development of plantation agriculture was accompanied by the development of transportation and communication. This, in turn, helped to bring the population into a single network. These changes together with expansion in education gave rise to an English educated Ceylonese middle class. Members of this middle class which did not observe ethnic or religious differences banded themselves together in a common agitation against the British rule.

Far-reaching changes were nevertheless made by the British in the island's constitutional system during this period. From the status of a crown colony, Sri Lanka passed through several stages before it became an independent sovereign state in 1948. In 1902, the country was placed under a Governor appointed by the Crown, almost an authoritarian regime. This system remained unchanged until the Colebrooke Commission recommended the setting up of Legislative and Executive Council in 1929. With these recommendations, Sri Lanka "became one of the orthodox crown colony types with a nominated Legislative Council"<sup>19</sup> The elective principle was introduced for the first time in 1910, mainly because of agitations by middle class elitist elements. Further reforms were introduced in 1920

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19. I.D.S. Weerawardana, Government and Politics in Ceylon (Colombo: Ceylon Economic Research Association, 1951), p. 3.

and 1923 which provided for a representative type of government.<sup>20</sup> In 1931 Sri Lanka obtained a semi-responsible government under the recommendations of Donoughmore Commission. At the time of independence Sri Lanka had a well established ongoing parliamentary type of government. The constitution recommended by the Soulbury Commission in 1946 provided for internal self-government. It was with minor modifications, adopted as the constitution of independent Sri Lanka. With the gradual development of representative institutions since the 1920s and the competition for political power, members of the different ethnic groups of the island participated in a common political system.

Despite this common political experience and other integrative forces, deep rooted differences on the basis of race, religion and language have divided Sri Lankans and hindered the integration of the island's multi-ethnic society. R.N. Kearney noted that:

The most important source of division and disruption in Ceylonese politics and the greatest impediment to integrative trends has been the persistence of sentiments of identification and solidarity with broader primordial groups generally referred to as communities.<sup>21</sup>

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20. Ibid., pp. 3-7.

21. R.N. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 4. See also W. Howard Wriggins, "Impediments to Unity in New Nations: The Case of Ceylon" in The American Political Science Review (Vol. 55, No. 2, June 1961), pp. 315-320.

Although the English educated middle class leaders of all the major ethnic groups joined together in the agitation for constitutional reforms and formed the Ceylon National Congress in 1919, the leaders of the two important ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Ceylon Tamils, drew apart on the question of representation in the legislative body. Consequently, the Ceylon Tamil leaders formed a separate political organization, the Tamil Mahajana Sabhai (The Great Council of Tamils) in 1920. This trend in the formation of separate political organizations based around a particular ethnic group on the basis of communal loyalty was soon followed by other ethnic communities too. For example, the Kandyan National Assembly (1925), the Sinhala Mahajana Sabha (The Great Council of Sinhalese (1931), the Ceylon Indian Congress (1939), the Muslim Political Organization, the Moors Political Committee, the European Association in the 1930s and the Tamil Congress (1944).

"The most significant rivalry" as R.N. Kearney commented, "has been between the Sinhalese majority and the Ceylon Tamil minority."<sup>22</sup> Since independence the differences between these two groups has tended to become aggravated. For example, when the Tamil Congress joined the Government in 1949, a section of its leaders opposed the move and finally resigned from the party. The splinter

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22. Ibid., p. 15.

group formed a new political party in December 1949, which came to be known as the Federal Party (FP). It was not until 1956 that the FP became a dominant force in Tamil politics. However, with the crisis on the official language issue the FP became the leading political party in the Tamil areas and since then it has maintained its position as the principal spokesman of the Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka. Though the FP is a minor party in Parliament it has considerable support in the Ceylon Tamil areas, especially in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Maurice Duverger categorized political parties on the basis of strength as "parties with a majority bent, major parties and minor parties."<sup>23</sup> In the theory on minor parties he identified them under two broad headings: (1) the personality parties, and (ii) the permanent minority parties.<sup>24</sup> In the analysis of the permanent minority parties Duverger observed that:

By their structure these are mass parties: they represent the modern type of minor party by comparison with the former which represent an archaic type.... They correspond to a section of public opinion, strongly minority-minded but relatively stable. We can thus distinguish parties based upon ethnical or geographical minorities, upon religious minorities and upon political minorities.<sup>25</sup>

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23. Maurice Duverger, Political Parties (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1967), p. 283.

24. Ibid., p. 290.

25. Ibid., p. 291.

The FP is based upon the support of the Tamil ethnic minority of Sri Lanka. As the representative of the Tamil minority it discourages any attempt at fusion of the two communities - the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

Duverger further pointed out that:

If a party is clearly a minority in the country as a whole but in a majority in certain districts its attitude becomes autonomist or even secessionist, which may imperil the unity of the country.<sup>26</sup>

The Tamil-speaking people are a minority in Sri Lanka as a whole but they are in a majority in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. From its inception in 1949, the FP has agitated for a federal form of government for Sri Lanka. It believes that only under a federal system could some of the major problems of the Tamils be settled. The FP employed Gandhian methods of non-violent resistance to achieve its objectives. When it failed to achieve a federal system it changed its policy to one of a separate state for the Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka.

Further, Duverger pointed out another important characteristic of a minor party:

Minor parties may exceptionally assume the role of arbiters and acquire considerable influence, either on the electoral or on the parliamentary plane. ... This position as arbiter is even more important on the parliamentary plane if the gap between the majority

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26. Ibid., p. 294.

and the minority is so small that the movement of the minor party is enough to alter the balance of power in parliament.<sup>27</sup>

Likewise, at least on two occasions the FP assumed the position of arbiter in parliament. After the general election of March 1960 the FP was in a bargaining position between two major parties as neither the United National Party (UNP) nor the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFD) had a majority to form a government. The FP presented its "minimum demands" to the UNP as a basis for its support to the UNP to form a government. These demands were rejected by the UNP and the FP voted with the rest of the opposition against the UNP at the division on the Throne Speech causing the downfall of the short-lived Senanayake government.

The FP's second opportunity was after the inconclusive general election of March 1965. This time, the leader of the UNP, Dudley Senanayake promised the FP that he would concede its "minimum demands". Consequently, the UNP was able to form a "National Government" with the support of the FP and several other small political groups.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the different strategies adopted by the FP in government as

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27. Ibid., pp. 294-295.

well as in opposition (1956-70). So far no detailed studies have been undertaken on the role of the FP in Sri Lankan politics. Study of the strategies of the FP will undoubtedly bring to light new facts about its role as an ethnic party in Sri Lankan politics. Not many studies have been undertaken on ethnic parties to clarify general theories formulated by scholars in the field. This study is an attempt to apply these general theories to the specific situation.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study attempts to investigate the strategy of the Federal Party in opposition (1956-65) as well as in government (1965-70). It is directed towards finding answers to the following questions: (i) What were the strategies that the Federal Party followed in opposition and in government to achieve its objectives? (ii) Why did it follow such strategies?, and (iii) How far and to what extent was it successful?

#### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Very little work of an academic nature has been published on the Federal Party. There is of course a considerable volume of party literature. We have selected one research paper and six books for examination and review. Among the six, four deal with Sri Lankan politics in its entirety with relevant sections on the Federal



Party. Our review is limited to the sections on the Federal Party.

The research paper published by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson on "The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics" is one among the few works that deal directly with the FP. This work based on the organizational aspects and the campaigns of the FP gives an insight into the activities of the party from its inception in 1949 to 1966. In relation to the party's strategy the author has commented that:

The party has employed two techniques to press home its demands. It has threatened and launched campaigns of non-co-operation and civil-disobedience to embarrass the Government. ... The other technique which the Party has by fortuitous circumstances been able to utilise has been its advantageous position vis-a-vis the Government's parliamentary majority.<sup>28</sup>

After a comprehensive analysis of the campaigns of the FP the author in the light of political development in Sri Lanka in the second half of the 1960s came to the conclusion that "the demand for federalism will have to be shelved for some considerable time",<sup>29</sup> because the UNP was prepared to grant a measure of administrative autonomy to the Tamil areas in 1965. But, later developments in the country proved that the UNP Government was unable

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28. A.J. Wilson, "The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics" in Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies (Vol. IV, No. 2, July 1966), p. 119.

29. Ibid., p. 134.

to enact the "District Councils Bill" into law. Part of the reason for this, as the author has pointed out, was that the opposition comprising the SLFP and its left wing allies were opposed to the settlement of the Tamil problem.

Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973 (London: MacMillan Press, 1974) is another contribution by the same author which covers twenty five years of political development in Sri Lanka. This study deals with many aspects of Sri Lanka's plural politics such as "Problems in a Plural Society", Political Behaviour and Political Forces", "Constitution and Government" and "Foreign Policy and Defence Arrangements". In addressing himself to the major question of the study, namely the survival of the democratic system in Sri Lanka,<sup>30</sup> the author also analyses the problems of the Tamil minority and its principal representative the FP, because, in his opinion "economic and ethnic factors cause crises and endanger democratic foundations."<sup>31</sup> The author argued that "the years 1956 to 1965 were the most disturbed phase in Sinhalese-Ceylon Tamil relations....."<sup>32</sup> During this period the FP in opposition conducted many non-violent campaigns on

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30. C.A. Woodward, "The Nature of Politics in Sri Lanka" in The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, (New Series Vol. II, June 1972), p. 72.

31. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 308.

32. Ibid., p. 51.

Gandhian lines to press its demands. The author maintained that although the FP had the opportunity to bargain on its demands in March 1960, the only achievement of the Party was the Pact it entered with the Prime Minister Bandaranaike in 1957.

The study on Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1967) by Robert N. Kearney is focused on the origins, the causes and the consequences of the language problem in Sri Lanka. This study analyses the conflicts between the Sinhalese majority and the Ceylon Tamil minority. The author has analysed the objectives and especially the tactics of the FP in detail. In relation to the FP's tactics he observed that:

...the widening political rift between the communities following the Sinhalese-only movement and the helplessness of Tamil parliamentary representatives ...apparently prompted the Federalists to emphasize extra-parliamentary methods of struggle.<sup>33</sup>

The author in a concluding remark observed that mobilizing political support on the basis of communal sentiments is the significant factor in the contemporary politics in Sri Lanka.

The same author's The Politics of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1973) is

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33. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 107.

based on political change in modern Sri Lanka. This study covers among other subjects, political parties, communal loyalties and group in politics and challenges to the political order. In the section on the Federal Party he analyses the objectives and the campaigns of the FP during the last two decades. In relation to the party's strategies the author has commented that:

The Federalists have alternatively followed strategies of applying extraparliamentary pressure through hartals and satyagraha campaigns and attempting to utilize a pivotal position in parliament to bargain between the SLFP and the UNP for concession in exchange for parliamentary support.<sup>34</sup>

The author is of the opinion that the FP was not able to gain its major objectives during the last two decades and thus "produced signs of restiveness within the party".<sup>35</sup>

The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969) by Calvin A. Woodward is a systematic study which analyses the formation, growth and the character of all political parties in Sri Lanka including the Federal Party. In the section on "Communal Parties" the author opened his discussion on the FP with the comment that "since its origin the FP has been isolated in parliament, unwilling to co-operate with any Sinhalese

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34. R.N. Kearney, The Politics of Ceylon [Sri Lanka] (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1973) p. 118.

35. Ibid., p. 118.

party and unable to find a Sinhalese party willing to co-operate with it."<sup>36</sup> However, he pointed out that in 1965 an agreement was reached between the UNP and the FP to form a national government. He argued that consequently "the FP has been able to bring itself into a more effective position in Parliament."<sup>37</sup> The author qualified this statement with the comment that "this constitutes a major change in the FP...."<sup>38</sup> But the fact remains that the FP had come to an understanding with the UNP in 1965 on the basis of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1956. It could therefore be argued that the FP had changed its policy in 1956. In fact however the FP did not change its policy until 1971. It was always prepared to come to a compromise with the major parties on the basis of what it termed its "minimum demands". The author in a concluding remark on this section stated:

the party has an image that is electorally profitable, it has an organization that is highly personalized at the local level.... and that discourages the development of a formal party organization.<sup>39</sup>

Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960) by W. Howard

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36. Woodward, The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon, p. 230.

37. Ibid., p. 230.

38. Ibid., p. 230.

39. Ibid., p. 230.

Wriggins is another important study on Sri Lanka's politics. It is a useful source of information on many aspects of Sri Lanka politics upto 1960. On the section on "Tamil Parties" the author analyses the background to the formation of the FP and its role in Sri Lanka politics upto 1960. He argued that the FP's policy of "federalism" was not clear and therefore ambiguous. He pointed out that:

Few of the proponents of the scheme for instance, ever troubled to present in sufficient detail the economic aspects of the federal "solution" to say nothing of delineating the specific powers that might be retained by the central government and those that would be devolved upon the component states.<sup>40</sup>

The author analysed the fundamental causes for the inter-ethnic rivalries between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority in detail. Regarding the FP's extra-parliamentary agitation, he noted that "through a policy of extraparliamentary organization on Gandhist lines, they induced the prime minister to agree to a measure of decentralization. ..." <sup>41</sup>

Satyagraha: The Freedom Movement of the Tamils in Ceylon (Jaffna: National Printers, 1962) by S. Ponniah is a study on the satyagraha campaign of the FP in 1961. The author has recorded the day to day events of the

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40. W. Howard Wriggins, Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 145.

41. Ibid., p. 147.

massive satyagraha campaign sponsored by the FP in 1961 in addition to the sit-down protest demonstration of the Party in 1956. This work is not a systematic analysis of the causes and consequences of the FP's satyagraha campaigns. It is more concerned with a description of the events during the satyagraha campaign of the FP. Despite this weakness it is a valuable source of information on the FP's extraparliamentary campaigns.

#### HYPOTHESIS

It is proposed in this study that unlike a normal political party, a party explicitly indentified with an ethnic minority cannot hope to capture a majority in parliament or influence the policies of government through normal parliamentary channels like voting, debating or negotiations. In the circumstances, if a party representing an ethnic minority wishes to achieve its objectives, it has to pursue alternate strategies as for example extra-parliamentary agitation or use its parliamentary strength in an unstable situation to achieve its goals.

The Federal Party adopted extra-parliamentary methods of agitation (on Gandhian lines of non-violent resistance) and attempted to utilize a pivotal position in parliament to bargain between the SLFP and the UNP to achieve its objectives. The basic hypothesis of this study is that the FP achieved some of its objectives because it followed

alternate strategies other than purely utilizing Parliament.

#### DELIMITATION

The period from 1956 to 1970 is selected for this study for the following specific reasons. Firstly, although the FP was formed in 1949, it had not become a dominant force in the Tamil speaking areas until 1956. Since 1956 the FP has maintained its position as the most influential Tamil political party in Sri Lanka's politics. Secondly from 1949 to 1972 the FP had advocated a federal form of government as the only solution to the Tamil problem. But when it failed to achieve this objective it changed its policy in 1972 to that of demanding a separate state for the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Thirdly, in 1972 the FP had come to an understanding with other Tamil political groups to form a "Tamil United Front". Though the FP has not even after the merger lost its separate identity, it has nevertheless ceased to function as a separate Tamil political party. For these reasons this study is limited to 1956-1970, the period in which the FP had been a dominant force as well as the single most influential party in Tamil politics.

The parliamentary debates (Hansard) of the House of Representatives of Ceylon which is used as the main source of information for this study provides all the information about the FP's parliamentary activities as well as information on its extraparliamentary campaigns. However it



must be realized that there is no complete record of the satyagraha campaigns of the party in these documents. To remedy this we will utilize information gathered from personal interviews with some of the political leaders in Sri Lanka.

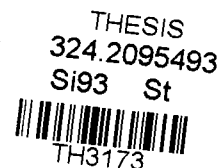
#### METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The method of investigation used in this study is basically the descriptive analysis. Three types of evidence are used in our investigation: (i) primary sources, (ii) information gathered from interviews with some Sri Lanka's party leaders, and (iii) secondary sources. The evidence gathered from all three sources are interpreted and investigated in the context of the events, developments and experiences of the past.

Among primary sources, the main source is the Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) of the House of Representatives of Ceylon (1948-70). Other sources are mainly from party literature such as Election Manifestos, Annual Convention Reports and Presidential Addresses, especially the FP's publication from 1949 to 1975. Information gathered by the author from personal interviews with party leaders such as party Presidents and General Secretaries, particularly with the FP leaders (e.g. the present President of the FP A. Amirthalingam, former FP Minister of Local Government M. Tiruchelvam) is also utilized. The FP's

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newspaper Sutantiran is a useful source of information. But for reasons of reliability we have double checked the information in other newspapers such as Thinakaran and Veerakesari, before using it for our study. We have also utilized the information obtained from research articles and books written by recognized academics who have specialized on Sri Lankan politics.

For the purpose of analysis this study is classified into five chapters.

Chapter I is an introduction to the general background of the problem under investigation. In this section, Sri Lanka's political system, the ethnic nature of its society, the relationship between the Sinhalese and Tamils, and the role of an ethnic minority party such as the FP are analysed. This chapter also includes a presentation of the problem to be investigated, a review of related literature and the methods of investigation.

Chapter II is a historical descriptive study of the origins and the development of the FP. It is divided into four sections, namely (i) the origins of the FP, (ii) the development of the FP (1949-56), (iii) the objectives of the FP, and (iv) an overview. In our interpretation careful weighing of evidence is undertaken regarding the validity of the source of information. The overview is a critical assessment of the FP's standing in Sri Lanka's politics.

Chapter III is an analysis of the FP's strategy in opposition (1956-65). As the FP had adopted Gandhian methods of non-violent resistance as its main strategy in opposition, we have tried to assess the relevance of Gandhian political thought at the beginning of this chapter. For the analysis of the FP's non-violent campaigns we have used J.V. Bondurant's frame-work<sup>42</sup> which she had evolved for her analysis of five satyagraha campaigns in India. The FP's strategy in opposition is assessed and evaluated at the end of this chapter. For our assessment and evaluation of the FP's strategy, inductive method of argument has been utilized.

Chapter IV is an analysis of the FP's strategy in Government and as an independent group in the House of Representatives from 1965 to 1970. It is divided into two sections, namely (i) the strategy of the FP in Government (1965-68), and (ii) the strategy of the FP as an independent group in the House of Representatives (1968-70). At the end of this chapter the strategy of the FP is assessed and evaluated. The same method of argument is utilized in this section as for Chapter II.

Chapter V is an assessment of the FP's strategy in Government as well as in opposition (1956-70). We have tried to confirm the validity of our arguments

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42. Joan V. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 45-46.

regarding a minority ethnic party in the light of the FP's achievements in opposition and in government. Finally an attempt is made to predict the future of the party in the light of past and present political developments in Sri Lanka. The findings of our study are generalized and presented at the end of this chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ORIGINS, THE DEVELOPMENT (1949-56) AND THE OBJECTIVES OF THE FEDERAL PARTY

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE FEDERAL PARTY

The history of political parties in Sri Lanka is a relatively short one when compared to that in other countries, especially in the West e.g. Great Britain or France.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the fact that Britain introduced universal suffrage and a semi-responsible system of government in 1931, political parties started playing a meaningful role in politics only in 1947, with a general election being held under the Soulbury Constitution of 1946.

The first political party in Sri Lanka, the Labour Party was organized by A.E. Goonasingha in 1927, with a working class base in Colombo. The oldest among the parties still in existence, the Troskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (The Equal Society Party) was formed in 1935, by a few young radicals who had returned home after their higher studies abroad. Two other organizations, the Ceylon Indian Congress and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress were

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1. C.A. Woodward, "The Party System in Comparative Perspective: An Assessment", in Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies (No. 4 - December 1974), pp. 144-153.

formed in 1939 and 1944 respectively, exclusively with the intention of safeguarding the interests of the two Tamil communities in Sri Lanka - the Indian Tamils and the Ceylon Tamils. The United National Party (UNP) was founded in 1946 by leading notables in the State Council and in the Ceylon National Congress, in anticipation of independence and elections under a new constitution.<sup>2</sup>

The formation of protest movements, which were precedents for the emergence of political parties was closely linked with the emergence of an indigenous middle class at the turn of this century. It was an outcome of economic, social, and educational changes introduced by the British during the nineteenth century, mainly because of the reforms introduced by the Colebrooke Commission in 1833<sup>3</sup> and especially because of the opening of plantation agriculture in the middle of the nineteenth century. Towards the end of the nineteenth century educational facilities were made available to Ceylonese and English education spread from the capital city Colombo to other principal towns. These changes together with increasing social mobility produced a middle class. "A small class of wealthy Ceylonese emerged," as C.A. Woodward has observed, "and more

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2. C.A. Woodward, The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon (Providence: Brown University Press, 1968), pp. 35-53.

3. In 1829, the Colebrooke Commission was appointed by the British Government, to investigate the political situation in Ceylon and recommend for reforms.

important, a large indigenous middle class developed that sought entry into the professional commercial and public service career system."<sup>4</sup> Consequently as R.N. Kearney commented, "the immediate political consequence of the formation of this class was a demand for Ceylonese participation in government."<sup>5</sup> A number of leading members of the Sinhalese and the Tamil middle class joined hands, on an equal footing in the agitation against the British colonial rule. As K.M. de Silva commented, "what marked off elite politics in Ceylon in the first two decades of the twentieth century, from the succeeding decades was the harmony that prevailed between the Sinhalese and Tamil leadership."<sup>6</sup> But this harmony between the leaders of the two communities did not last long. Within two years of the formation of Ceylon National Congress in 1919, there emerged a rift between their leaders on the question of territorial representation and a reserved seat for the Ceylon Tamils of the Western Province. The Sinhalese leadership was not willing to accommodate the proposals of

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4. Woodward, The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon, p. 26.

5. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 24.

6. Kingsly M. de Silva, "The Formation and Character of the Ceylon National Congress" in the Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies (Vol. 10, Nos. 1 & 2 - December 1967) p. 90.

the Tamil leaders for the continuation of communal representation in legislature and executive councils and they vociferously campaigned for territorial representation.

The origins of the Federal Party can best be explained in the context of these pre-independence political developments. The formation of the Tamil Mahajana Sabhai (The Great Council of Tamils) in August 1921 by Sir P. Ramanathan and later in 1923 the Ceylon Tamil League by Sir P. Arunachalam were indirectly connected with the emergence of the immediate predecessor of the FP, namely the All Ceylon Tamil Congress in 1944. All these three organizations had similar objectives, namely adequate representation for Ceylon Tamils in the legislative council. There was an emphasis on Tamil nationalism as bears "... something essentially divergent from if not positively hostile to Sinhalese nationalism."<sup>7</sup> The FP was formed in December 1949 for precisely this reason.

Underlying these political rivalries was the economic competition between the middle classes among the Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamils for public service employment. The Ceylon Tamil leaders sought weightage in representation for their community to safeguard the interests of their middle classes. The Sinhalese leadership opposed the

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7. K.M. de Silva, The Ceylon National Congress in Disarray II: "The Triumph of Sir William Manning, 1921-1924" in The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies (Vol. II, No. 1, June 1973), p. 2.



Tamil leaders for reasons similar - to protect their middle class interests. It was mainly an intra-elite struggle, as A.J. Wilson has pointed out, "for the share in the spoils of political office as well as for positions in the public service."<sup>8</sup>

The proposals put forward by the Ceylon Tamil leaders were not acceptable to the Donoughmore Commission.<sup>9</sup> The Commission in recommending the abolition of communal representation noted that:

the evils of communal representation have accentuated rather than diminished racial differences, and caste distinction, always acute, have with the passage of years, lost little of their emotional appeal.<sup>10</sup>

As a protest against the proposals of the Donoughmore Commission, the Tamils of the north of Ceylon, boycotted the general election held in 1931 under the Donoughmore Constitution. The newly formed radical Jaffna Youth Congress in the north also boycotted the elections mainly on the ground that the reforms were not adequate enough for the Ceylonese. The organization campaigned for

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8. Wilson, "Election in Sri Lanka", Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Canadian Association of Asian Studies - held at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton on 27th May 1977, pp. 4-5.

9. A Royal Commission was appointed by the British government in 1928 to investigate the political situation in Ceylon and to recommend further reforms.

10. Wilson, "Elections in Sri Lanka", p. 8.

complete self-government.<sup>11</sup>

However, the Tamils contested the second general election held in 1936. But they were not in a position to influence the policies of government. Their leadership soon alleged that they were being dominated by the Sinhalese majority in the State Council. The fears of the Tamil membership in the second State Council were reinforced by the newly formed Board of Ministers, which did not have any Tamils. "By a well planned manoeuvre"<sup>12</sup> the State Council elected to its Board of Ministers only those belonging to the Sinhalese community. It came to be known as the "Pan Sinhala Ministry". In defence of this arrangement, Sir Baron Jayatilake, the Sinhalese leader of the State Council, argued that the "pan sinhala ministry was prompted by the desire to obtain unanimity on the board for constitutional revision, which was impossible as long as it contained minority ministers."<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the creation of a "Pan Sinhala Ministry" had clearly demonstrated the fact to the Tamils that territorial representation when applied in an unqualified way in a multi-racial

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11. Sidney D. Bailey, Ceylon (Great Britain: William Brendon and Son Ltd., 1952), p. 145.

12. Ibid., p. 147.

13. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 34

society could neutralize the political power of minority ethnic groups.

As a counter to Sinhalese "domination" the Tamil representatives of the second State Council joined as a group under the leadership of G.G. Ponnambalam. During this period Ponnambalam put forward a formula for "balanced representation" which he argued would be the best safeguard for the ethnic and religious minorities against the domination of the Sinhalese majority. This constitutional formula popularly known as "fifty-fifty" meant that in any future reform of the constitution the Sinhalese community would get half the seats in the legislature and the remaining half would be assigned to the minorities. Thus, Ponnambalam argued that "no community would be in a position to impose its will on the others."<sup>14</sup> By this time Ponnambalam had become the acknowledged leader of the Ceylon Tamils and Ceylon Tamil Community gave their overwhelming support to his scheme. But other minority groups were reluctant to accept this formula, especially the Muslims. The Sinhalese leaders unanimously opposed this scheme but Ponnambalam hoped that the British Colonial Office would sympathise with the Tamils. -

Following the end of the World War II, Britain decided in 1944 to appoint a commission of enquiry to

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14. Ibid., p. 36.

investigate the political situation in the country and to make recommendations for reforms. Part of the reason for this move was to placate minority fears. Britain had earlier agreed to the Ministers formulating a constitutional scheme on the understanding that such a scheme should command the support of three quarters of the legislature body, the State Council, excluding the Speaker and the three officers of the state.

Ponnambalam and the Ceylon Tamil members of the State Council together with others outside, decided in 1944 to form an organization to agitate the Tamil cause. This organization came to be known as the "Tamil Congress" (T.C). It came to be the most influential Ceylon Tamil organization and it put forward a vigorous case for balanced representation when the Royal Commission<sup>15</sup> headed by Lord Soulbury visited the island in 1945.

In demanding balanced representation in the future legislature, the Tamil Congress in their evidence before the Soulbury Commission alleged that the Board of Ministers had discriminated against the Tamils in economic matters and in regard to employment in the public service. The Soulbury Commissioners rejected the demand for

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15. A Royal Commission was appointed by the British government in 1944 to investigate the political situation in Ceylon and to make recommendation for reforms.

"balanced representation" on the score that it will be a return to communal representation. It did not think there was substantial evidence of discrimination against the minorities by the majority.<sup>16</sup> The Soulbury Commissioners were however, fully aware of the fears and suspicions among the minority communities in the island. They therefore decided that provision should be made for the protection of minority interests in the constitution. These safeguards were incorporated in the constitution mainly due to the agitation and representations made by the Tamil Congress.

Although Tamil Congress leaders were unhappy with the proposals made by the Soulbury Commission, they decided to contest the general election under the Soulbury Constitution with a view of expressing their disagreement with the new constitution. The 1947 general election in the Tamil areas was therefore fought on one main issue: whether the Tamils should oppose the Constitution and take an independent stand or whether Tamils should collaborate with Sinhalese majority and cooperate with the latter in working the Soulbury Constitution. "The contest was" as Kearney has commented, "an early and stark illustration

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16. A.J. Wilson, "The Contribution of Some Leading Ceylon Tamils to the Constitutional and Political Development of Ceylon during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in the Proceeding of The First International Conference of Tamil Studies (Kuala Lumpur: Rajir Printers, 1966), p. 673.

of the Tamil voters preference for political parties exclusively devoted to the Tamil Community's interests".<sup>17</sup>

The Tamil Congress contested nine out of the thirteen Tamil constituencies and won seven. The policy of the Congress was best illustrated in a telegram sent to the British Secretary of State immediately after the elections.

The Tamil people of Ceylon have rejected the Soulbury Constitution in as much as at the general elections not one candidate of the UNP was elected to Parliament. ... An unitary government with present composition of legislature and structure of executive totally unacceptable to Tamils. In the absence of a satisfactory alternative we demand the right of self-determination for the Tamil people.<sup>18</sup>

The general election of 1947 did not produce a clear majority for any single party to form a viable government. (see Table I, p. 35) As United National Party gained the most number of seats (42) in the House of Representatives its leader D.S. Senanayake was called upon to form a government. He was able to form a stable government because of the support of six nominated members<sup>19</sup> and of a

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17. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 37.

18. Appapillai Amirthalingam, "In The High Court: Trail At-Bar No. 1 of 1976" Unpublished typescript, 1976.

19. Under Section 11 (2) of the Soulbury Constitution the Governor-General was empowered after a General Election to appoint, on the advice of the Prime Minister, not more than six members to the House of Representatives to represent inadequately represented interests.

TABLE I

## Party Positions At General Election, 1947

| Parties            | Candidates | Seats won | % seats | Votes polled | % votes | Votes per candidate |
|--------------------|------------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|---------------------|
| UNP                | 98         | 42        | 44.2    | 751,432      | 39.81   | 7,668               |
| LSSP               | 28         | 10        | 10.5    | 204,020      | 10.80   | 7,286               |
| BLPI               | 10         | 5         | 5.2     | 113,193      | 5.99    | 11,319              |
| CP                 | 13         | 3         | 3.1     | 70,331       | 3.72    | 5,410               |
| LP                 | 9          | 1         | 1.0     | 38,932       | 2.06    | 4,326               |
| TC                 | 9          | 7         | 7.3     | 82,499       | 4.37    | 9,167               |
| CIC                | 7          | 6         | 6.3     | 72,230       | 3.82    | 10,319              |
| ULC                | 2          | 0         | 0.0     | 3,953        | 0.21    | 1,977               |
| SP                 | 3          | 0         | 0.0     | 1,393        | 0.07    | 464                 |
| Independents       | 181        | 21        | 22.1    | 549,381      | 29.10   | 3,035               |
| Total              | 360        | 95        |         | 1,887,364    |         |                     |
| Total no. of votes |            |           |         | 3,052,84     |         |                     |
| Percentage polled  |            |           |         | 61.3         |         |                     |

SOURCE: A.J. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973 (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 19 ) p. 170.

few other independent members of Parliament. With the support of A.E. Goonasingha and his Labour Party the UNP obtained an overall majority in the House of Representatives. In the beginning the Tamil Congress was not willing to enter into a coalition with the UNP, but within a year D.S. Senanayake succeeded in persuading the TC leader to join his government and to accept ministerial office in it. By this time the TC had changed its policies from one of opposition to the "Sinhalese dominated government" to one of "responsive co-operation."<sup>20</sup> Ponnambalam argued that "the future of the Tamil people depends on the goodwill and co-operation of the majority community."<sup>21</sup> When Ponnambalam joined the government he was given the portfolio of Industries, Industrial Research and Fisheries. Another member was appointed as Junior minister. The majority of the TC parliamentary membership joined the government with their leader, but a section continued in opposition.

The difference of opinion between Ponnambalam and another leading member of the Party S.J.V. Chelvanayakam regarding the decision to join the UNP Government paved the way for a split in the party. Up to the time of

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20. Woodward, The Growth of a Party System in Ceylon, p. 73.

21. Karikalan, Ean Thamil Arasu? (Jaffna: Ilan-thamilar Pathipakam, 1965), p. 21.



joining the government Ponnambalam continued to champion the "Tamil cause" warning of Sinhalese domination and the demise of Tamil rights. By joining the government he weakened his own organization. The splinter group, under the leadership of Chelvanayakam wanted a satisfactory solution to a number of problems that affected the Tamil-speaking community. They wanted an amicable settlement of the question of the Indian Tamils, and they asked for an immediate cessation of what they called "the system of state aided colonization by Sinhalese people of the traditional homelands of Tamil-speaking people".<sup>22</sup> They were also concerned about the National flag in which no proper place was given to the Tamils. Chelvanayakam maintained that only under a federal form of constitution, could the problems of the Tamil community be settled.

In 1948, the government introduced a number of acts pertaining to citizenship which resulted in the disfranchisement of a large section of the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. Chelvanayakam and his parliamentary splinter group of the TC vigorously opposed these bills. During the debate on one of the citizenship bills in the House on 10th December, 1948 Chelvanayakam argued that:

the Hon: Prime Minister made a comparison

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22. Wilson, "The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics", in Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies (Vol. IV, No. 2, July 1966), p. 118.

with the descendants of the Portugese and the English. Without being offensive to anybody I wish to say this: Their members do not portend any danger to anybody politically. The only communities which are large enough like the Tamils, the Indians, and the Muslims, which cause fear. It is such bodies that the Hon: Prime Minister wants to hit. He is not hitting us now directly. But when the language question comes up, which will be the next one to follow in this series of legislation, we will know where we stand. Perhaps, that will not be the end of it. ... I oppose it firstly on that ground.<sup>23</sup>

The legislation in question was passed in the House of Representatives with five TC members voting with the government and the remaining two voting against. "The immediate pretext" as A.J. Wilson has observed, "for the Federal Party's emergence in December 1949 was the objection of two MP's and a TC senator to the legislation of 1948 and 1949 against the Indian Tamils".<sup>24</sup> The TC members who voted against the legislature resigned from the party as a protest and formed an organization, the Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi. In English it was called the Federal Party of the Tamil-speaking people.

The Federal Party was formally inaugurated on 18th December, 1949 at the Government Clerical Service Union Building, Maradana, Colombo. On that day 216 working

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23. The Federal Party of Ceylon, Ceylon Faces Crisis (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1957), p. 19.

24. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 164.

members joined the Party and Chelvanayakam was elected as the President while E.M. Naganathan and V. Navaratnam were elected joint General Secretaries.<sup>25</sup> In his Presidential address Chelvanayakam said that they came together with the common aim of creating an organization to work for the attainment of freedom of the Tamil speaking people in Ceylon. After explaining what he felt were the discriminating measures taken by the government of the day, Chelvanayakam warned of the dangers of the government's colonization policy:

...Even more dangerous to the Tamil speaking people is the Government's colonization policy. We have only the beginning of it in Gal-Oya. The land to be irrigated under the Gal-Oya scheme lies in the Eastern Province, a Tamil speaking area. There is evidence that the Government intends planting Sinhalese population in this purely a Tamil-speaking area...<sup>26</sup>

Further Chelvanayakam emphasized that only under a federal form of government could the separate identity and the interests of the Tamil speaking people be safeguarded. Thus, he became a determined advocate of political autonomy for the Tamils.

The emergence of the FP in 1949 marked a significant change in the policies hitherto followed by the Ceylon

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25. See N. Sivapatham, *Thamilar Chelvam Chelva*, (Achchvveli, Sri Lanka: Thamayanthi Pathippakam, 1977) pp .15-16.

26. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, Presidential Address Delivered at the Inaugural and First Meeting of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi on 18th December, 1949 (Colombo: I.T.A.K n.d) p. 3.

Tamils. Nevertheless, the fundamental policy of safeguarding the separate identify of the Tamils continued.

As Wilson aptly observed that:

For the first time there had emerged a group which had begun to think in terms of an economic future for the Ceylon Tamils, not in the public service or in the common exploitation by Sinhalese and Tamils but in the preservation and development in isolation of a "Tamil homeland".<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the new party attempted to appeal to Tamil nationalism by harbouring back to the separate Tamil Kingdom in the North of Ceylon before the advent of the Portuguese. When referring to this K.M. de Silva observed that:

This was the Federal Party's great contribution to Tamil politics. Not only did they draw attention to the possession of a Tamil territorial unit, and the memory of an independent Tamil Kingdom (which survived from the thirteen century to the beginning of the seventeenth), they also emphasized the role of language as the determinant of nationhood.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEDERAL PARTY (1949-1956)

The period from December 1949 to 1952 and for some time after 1952 was a period of frustration for the FP leadership. The popularity of the TC among Ceylon Tamils

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27. Wilson, "The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics" in Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies (Vol. IV, No. 2, July 1966), p. 118.

28. K.M. de Silva, "Nationalism And Its Impact" in The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies (Vol. IV, No. 1 & 2, December 1974), p. 69.

and the personality of its leader Ponnambalam proved serious obstacles. Even before the formation of the FP in December, 1949, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and C. Vanniasingham had attempted to explain to the Tamil people in the North the disadvantageous position of the Tamils in being under a unitary form of government. For instance, in November 1947, in a propaganda meeting of the TC, held in Jaffna, (principal town of the Northern Province) Chelvanayakam emphasized that in order to live as an equal and independent race with the Sinhalese, a unitary form of government was not suitable for the Tamil speaking people. He felt that a federal form of government was the best solution for the Tamils.<sup>29</sup>

When Chelvanayakam and Vanniasingham attempted to organize meetings in the Tamil areas to spread their gospel of federalism, the meetings were disrupted and speakers were manhandled by TC supporters. The meeting organized at Kailaya Pillaiyar Kovilady, Jaffna by Chelvanayakam was disorganized and even the Chairman M.A. Muththukumar was not able to deliver his address. When the opponents entered the rostrum it collapsed and the meeting was finally cancelled.<sup>30</sup>

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29. N. Sivapatham, Thamilar Chelvam Chelva (Atchaveli, Sri Lanka: Thamayanthi Pathippakam, 1977), p. 14.

30. Ibid., pp. 14-15.

The party leadership directed its propaganda towards appealing to the national consciousness of the Tamil-speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The Party's first National Convention in 1951 declared that:

The Tamil-speaking people in Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood, firstly that of a separate historical past in this island at least as ancient and as glorious as that of Sinhalese, secondly, by the fact of their being a linguistic entity entirely different from that of Sinhalese ....and finally by reason of their territorial habitation of definite areas which constitute over one-third of this island.<sup>31</sup>

But soon they found that the Tamils who were in employment in the public services, in the business sector and in the professions in the Sinhalese areas were not prepared to support their policies. These sections preferred the Tamil Congress policy of responsive co-operation with the ruling party and argued the Tamils could gain more by co-operation with the Sinhalese conservative leadership. For economic reasons, these classes favored the policy of the TC. Naturally, the FP leadership concentrated on the rural Tamil people such as farmers and the school teachers who had no interests other than in the North and East. It was easy for the party to attract

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31. The Case for a Federal Constitution for Ceylon: Resolutions Passed at the First National Convention of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (Colombo: Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, 1951), p. 1

the rural people towards Tamil nationalism and it concentrated in establishing party branches in the villages of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The first national convention was successfully held in 1951 by the FP and resolutions were passed explaining its objectives.

A general election was called in March 1952, The election gave the FP its first opportunity to go before the people and "it was therefore anxious to impress the Tamil voter".<sup>32</sup> In the election campaign the FP spokesman emphasized that their leadership was reliable and incorruptible and denounced the TC leaders as "betrayers" for accepting ministerial position in a government which was pursuing a policy of colonizing the traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking people with Sinhalese people in order to contract the area occupied traditionally by Tamils and of reducing the parliamentary strength of the Tamils by the disfranchisement of the Indian Tamils. They warned the Tamils that the ultimate objective of the UNP was to relegate the Tamil language and culture to a subordinate position by denying equal status to the Tamil language. On the other hand, the TC propagandists argued that the interests of the Tamils could only be safeguarded by co-operating with the Sinhalese and by continuing the coalition with

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32. Wilson, "The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics" in Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, op. cit., p. 132.

the UNP. They pointed out that because of their co-operation, the Tamil areas had received economic assistance, in the form of industrial plants in the North and East as well as irrigation projects during the period 1948-52. The 1952 election in the Tamil areas were mainly a contest between the TC and the FP. The central issue in the election was that the TC was prepared to co-operate with the UNP whereas the FP was not. The latter campaigned for a federal form of government. The result of the general election in the Ceylon Tamil areas was very much in favour of the <sup>FP</sup>TC. The FP not only fared very poorly but also its leader Chelvanayakam was defeated. The party contested seven seats and won only two, while the TC won four out of the seven seats it contested (see Table II, p. 45).

The setback at the general election did not discourage the FP, for it continued to warn the Tamil people of the dangers of Sinhalese "domination" under a unitary form of government. In an address immediately after his election results were announced, Chelvanayakam, at the Jaffna Town Hall, said that within a short period of the formation of the FP it had developed and the election has helped their movement to develop. He said that he was neither discouraged nor was his defeat a defeat of the party. He was confident that in the future his party would become a movement to safeguard the rights of the Tamil-speaking



TABLE II

## Party/Positions At General Election, 1952

| Parties               | Candidates | Seats<br>won | %<br>seats | Votes<br>polled | %<br>votes | Votes per<br>Candidate |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|------------|------------------------|
| UNP                   | 81         | 54           | 56.80      | 1,026,005       | 44.08      | 12,667                 |
| SLFP                  | 48         | 9            | 9.5        | 361,250         | 15.52      | 7,526                  |
| LSSP                  | 39         | 9            | 9.5        | 305,133         | 13.11      | 7,824                  |
| CP-VLSSP              | 19         | 4            | 4.2        | 134,528         | 5.78       | 7,080                  |
| LP                    | 5          | 1            | 1.1        | 27,096          | 1.16       | 5,419                  |
| TC                    | 7          | 4            | 4.2        | 64,512          | 2.77       | 9,216                  |
| FP                    | 7          | 2            | 2.1        | 45,331          | 1.95       | 6,476                  |
| RP                    | 9          | 0            | 0.0        | 33,001          | 1.42       | 3,667                  |
| BRP                   | 3          | 0            | 0.0        | 3,987           | 0.17       | 1,329                  |
| Independents          | 85         | 12           | 12.6       | 326,783         | 14.04      | 3,845                  |
| Total                 | 303        | 95           |            | 2,327,626       |            |                        |
| Total No. of<br>votes |            |              |            | 2,990,881       |            |                        |
| Percentage<br>polled  |            |              |            |                 | 74         |                        |

SOURCE: A.J. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 170.

people.<sup>33</sup>

For some time after the election, the party concentrated its energies on finding legal remedies for the disfranchised Indian Tamils. Chelvanayakam along with others challenged before the Supreme Court and later the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, the validity of the citizenship legislation of the UNP Government. Two other election petitions were filed, one by Chelvanayakam against his rival S. Natesan and the other by party sympathisers against G.G. Ponnambalam. All three cases went against the party.<sup>34</sup>

When the Party's efforts to obtain legal remedies failed, it decided to concentrate on indoctrinating the Tamil people with their policies. The leadership's aim was to make their party the national organization of the Tamil-speaking people. To achieve their objective, the leadership attempted to unite the various sections of the Tamil-speaking people. In this venture the party faced serious problems within the Tamil community. Firstly, there are caste differences which divide the Tamil Community on a vertical basis. Secondly, there are regional differences between the Tamils of the Northern and

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33. N. Sivapatham, Thamilar Chelvam Chelva, p. 17.

34. Wilson, "The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics" in Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, (Vol. IV, No. 2, July 1966), p. 127.

Eastern Provinces. Finally, social and economic differences between the Ceylon Tamils on the one hand and the Indian Tamils and Ceylon Moors on the other hand have made unity difficult of achievement.

The Party's first convention in 1951, declared as one of the important objectives:

The regeneration and unification of the Tamil-speaking people of Ceylon by the removal of all forms of social inequalities and injustices, in particular that of untouchability wherever it exists.<sup>35</sup>

The caste system among the Tamils is more rigid and steeply hierarchial when compared to Sinhalese society. The Vellalas (cultivator) form the majority like their counterparts, the Goigamas among the Sinhalese. The fisher caste among the Tamils are Karaiyars and Mukkuvars. There are Koviyars whose traditional occupation is performing domestic services to the Vellalas and also there are craftsmen like Thattars, Kollars, Thachchars, Nadduvars and Vannars. Finally at the base are the "untouchables". Until very recently the Vellalas had maintained a dominant position by retaining ownership of land and monopolizing higher education.<sup>36</sup>

The FP pledged that it would abolish caste distinctions among the Tamils. As a first step in uniting the

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35. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 100.

36. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 52.

Tamil-speaking people the Party started a movement for equal treatment of all Tamil-speaking people in public places such as eating houses and barber saloons. The Party leaders spearheaded a movement by eating at the houses of the untouchables. But the fact remain that the party has so far not been successful in its efforts to eradicate the caste system as a whole except for their moral support for the temple entry for the untouchables.

Next to caste distinctions, the Party faced the problem of regional differences between the Tamils of the Northern Province and Eastern Province. The FP has succeeded to a limited extent in uniting these two groups in the opposition to the pro-Sinhalese policies of post 1956 governments. But differences between the two groups still present. Party members from the Eastern Province complain that leaders from the North were trying to dominate the Party.<sup>37</sup>

However, the Party was not successful in its attempt to win over the Tamils of Indian origin in the plantation areas. The Indian Tamils, predominantly estate labourers, live in isolation in the land locked plantations. They are separated from the Ceylon Tamils socially as well as geographically. As Kearney observed:

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37. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 101.

Language and religion are common to the two communities, but differences of historical background, economic position, caste, and intangible factors of identification have militated against a close unity.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this difference, the immediate reason for the formation of the FP was to protect the rights of the Indian Tamils. The Party however made slight headway when it founded a trade union in the plantation areas in 1962, which came to be known as Ilankai Tholilalar Kazhakam (Ceylon Workers League).

In the case of uniting the Moors, the Party was not very successful. Those Moors who live in the Sinhalese areas speak the Sinhalese language and are prepared to accept Sinhalese as the official language. In contrast, the Moors of the Eastern Province have common traditions and beliefs with the Tamils and speak the Tamil language and they at first sympathized with the FP's language policies. But they are not in favour of the Party's policy for autonomy. The Moors are suspicious about the Hindu Tamil majority and are conscious of their separate ethnic identity. A Moor politician claimed that: "this country is the home not merely of the Tamils and Sinhalese but also a third nation, the Ceylon Moors."<sup>39</sup>

Thus, in its attempt to unite the Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka, the FP achieved only a modest success.

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38. Ibid., p. 103.

39. Ibid., p. 103.

However, when the official language problem reached crisis proportions in 1955, the FP assumed prominence in the Tamil-speaking areas. After the general election of 1956 it maintained its position as the principal spokesman of the Tamil-speaking people.

In August 1953, opposition parties staged a one day Hartal as a protest against the UNP Government's proposal to raise the price of rice and other consumer items. The FP also joined this protest demonstration and successfully conducted an one day Hartal in the Tamil areas. Again when the Prime Minister Sir John Kotalawala visited Jaffna on an official tour in 1955, the Party staged a demonstration to protest against what it said were the anti-Tamil policies of the UNP. The younger members of the Party led by A. Amirthalingam took an active part in it. But these activities did not produce any impact in the Tamil-speaking areas.

However, when the SLFP changed its policy from Sinhala and Tamil to Sinhala only with provision for the reasonable use of the Tamil language in 1955, followed by the UNP in 1956 to one of Sinhala only without any provisions for the use of Tamil, the Tamil members of these two parties resigned and the majority of Tamils turned to the FP to defend their rights. The Tamils outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces too looked to the Party for leadership.

Parliament was dissolved in 1956. The reason for the early dissolution was to take the language issue to the people. The language issue was an important factor in the 1956 general election. In this election the younger members of the FP were active in campaigning for the party. The main speakers like A. Amirthalingam, C. Rajadurai, Kari-kalan, Puthumailolan and M. Moulana were the main propagandists for the Party's success at the polls in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

#### THE OBJECTIVES OF THE FEDERAL PARTY

The objectives of the Party were formulated at the National Convention of the FP held in Trincomalee on 19th August, 1956. A resolution adopted by the convention proclaimed four demands: (i) "replacement of the present constitution by a rational and democratic constitution based on the Federal Principle;"<sup>40</sup> (ii) parity of status for the Tamil language with the Sinhalese language; (iii) repeal of the existing citizenship laws which discriminated against the Indian Tamil population; and (iv) "immediate cessation of colonizing the traditional Tamil-speaking areas with Sinhalese people."<sup>41</sup> The Party has consistently adhered to these four demands in its campaigns, proposals for negotiations and in its publications.

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40. The Federal Party of Ceylon, Ceylon Faces Crisis (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1957), p. 31.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

The demand for a Federal Constitution

Federalism or regional autonomy has been advocated as a suitable form of arrangement to solve the problems of national minorities in the island by the leaders of both Sinhalese and Tamils on various occasions in the recent past. The leaders of the Kandyan National Assembly agitated in the late 1920s for a federal system of government to safeguard the interests of the Kandyan Sinhalese. But they were not successful in their endeavours.<sup>42</sup>

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the leader of the SLFP had been a staunch advocate of decentralization of powers from the centre. When speaking in the House of Representatives in 1958, he said that;

Regarding regional councils, not only shortly before the last elections but for many years I personally, as Minister of Local Government, have had the idea of decentralization ... as one of the ways of solving one of the chief difficulties that existed.<sup>43</sup>

In the "Pact" he entered into with the FP leader Chelvanayakam, Bandaranaike agreed to provide a measure of regional autonomy in the Tamil speaking areas. In 1965, before the formation of the "National Government" Dudley Senanayake promised the leader of the Fp that he will introduce necessary legislation to establish "District

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42. K.M. de Silva, The Ceylon National Congress in Disarray II: The Triumph of Sir William Manning, 1921-1924 in The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies (Vol. III, No.1, December 1974), p. 37.

43. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) House of Representatives, Official Report (Colombo: Government Press - 1958), Column 4495.



Councils", to provide a measure of administrative autonomy to the Tamil-speaking areas. But both the Bandaranaike and Senanayake administrations were unable to fulfill their respective promises due to widespread opposition in the Sinhalese areas. The Marxist leaders too were in favour of decentralization on the basis of regional councils.

From 1949 to 1971 the FP had been advocating a federal form of constitution for Sri Lanka as the only suitable means to solve some of the outstanding problems of the Tamils. The Party in its first national convention proclaimed as its objective:

the attainment of freedom for Tamil speaking people of Ceylon by the establishment of an autonomous Tamil State on the linguistic basis within the framework of a Federal Union of Ceylon.<sup>44</sup>

But in fact the Party failed to spell out clearly what exactly it meant by the proposed measure. For example the FP's 1956 annual convention demanded a demarcation of:

administrative areas which are contiguous and linguistically more homogenous... to be constituted into autonomous states within the framework of a Federal Union.<sup>45</sup>

Further the Party's 1956 Election Manifesto attempted to explain the form of federal structure it was proposing.

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44. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 96.

45. Federal Party of Ceylon, Ceylon Faces Crisis, p. 24.

It referred to the Swiss political system as an excellent model to be followed in Sri Lanka. The party declined to propose a model that would be suitable for Sri Lanka.

However, the Party failed to make clear the specific powers that might be retained by the centre and those of the federating units. Nothing was mentioned about the economic viability of a Federal Union in Sri Lanka.

For the first time the Party drew up a detailed scheme when Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike requested the FP to submit a memorandum setting out its demands in 1957. The FP included the resolutions made regarding its federal policy at the annual party convention of 1956 in the memorandum. In addition it spelt out clearly the constitutional position of the Tamil autonomous state. According to the memorandum, the Tamil autonomous state should comprise the Northern and Eastern Provinces with a chief minister and a cabinet in charge of the internal administration. The amending procedure of the constitution would need the co-operation of the Tamil units also. It specified that there should be a special Supreme Court comprising judges from Sinhalese and Tamil units to settle the disputes.

Subsequently, the FP made an attempt towards drawing a comprehensive constitutional scheme when it submitted a memorandum to the Steering Committee of the Constituent Assembly in 1971. In 1971, the United Front (UF) government comprising the SLFP, the LSSP and the CP convened

a national assembly to draw up a new constitution for Sri Lanka. Thereafter the Minister of Constitutional Affairs invited memoranda from all the political parties. To this Assembly the FP submitted a scheme based on the federal principle. It identified the boundaries of the proposed federal units as well as the division of powers between the centre and the states. The memorandum stated that the Federal Republic of Ceylon would consist of the following states:

The states consisting of (a) the Southern and Western Regions; (b) the North-Central and North Western Regions; (c) the Central Regions; (d) Northern and Eastern Regions of the Republic. The city of Colombo and the Suburbs....shall be administered by the Central Government.<sup>46</sup>

Article 16 of the memorandum explained the division of powers and the subjects coming under the jurisdiction of the central government. This constitutional scheme was rejected by the Constituent Assembly and as a protest the FP members resigned from that body. When the Party failed to achieve its objective of a federal constitution, it changed its previous policy of federalism in 1972 to the formation of a separate state for the Tamils.

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46. The Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi, Memorandum on the Constitution submitted to the Steering Committee of the Constituent Assembly (Chunnakam, Sri Lanka: Thirumakal Press - n.d) p. 5.

The demand for parity of status to the Tamil language with Sinhalese language

The origin of the official language issue in Sri Lanka was related to the Swabhasha movement, which in turn originated as a protest against the privileged English educated elite who controlled the administration of the country as well as monopolized the employment opportunities available in the country. Swabhasha means one's own native language, namely the Sinhalese and the Tamil languages. It was a protest by the majority of people against being governed in a language which they did not understand. A select committee of the State Council on "Official Language" in 1944 reported the situation as: "a Government of the Sinhalese or Tamil speaking 6,200,000 by the English speaking 20,000 Government servants, for 400,000 English-speaking people."<sup>47</sup>

The Sinhalese who ardently advocated Swabhasha maintained that: "the very existence of the Sinhalese people as a unique and distinguishable group was dependent on the survival of the Sinhalese language..."<sup>48</sup> They demanded Sinhalese language should be made the official language. The movement was strengthened by the Sinhalese national

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47. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 60.

48. Ibid., p. 63.

resurgence in the beginning of the nineteenth century based on "sentimental attachment to the Sinhalese language as a part of the Sinhalese cultural heritage."<sup>49</sup>

The Tamils were not enthusiastic about the Swabhasha movement for obvious reasons. Because of the early establishment of Christian Missionary schools in the North, the Tamils were in an advantageous position in obtaining English education. It made it possible for many Tamils to enter the public services. Because of this advantage, they were reluctant to abandon English for the national languages.

Under these circumstances J.R. Jeyawardana, the present President of the Republic introduced a resolution in the State Council on 24th May, 1944 to make "Sinhalese the official language of Ceylon within a reasonable number of years."<sup>50</sup> As the Tamil members of the State Council protested against the move, the resolution was amended to include Tamil also as an official language. The liberal policies followed by the then Sinhalese State Councillors made this change possible. But it was not made clear at that time what would be the relative status of Tamil to Sinhalese. It was generally understood that equal status would be given to both languages.

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49. Ibid., p. 63.

50. Ibid., p. 63.

The Swabhasha movement was mainly conducted by the Sinhalese indigenous elite. The latter changed their position from official status for the Sinhalese and Tamil languages to official status for the Sinhalese language only. The competition for public sector employment between the middle classes of the two communities played an important part in giving the language problem a communal turn. For reasons mentioned earlier the Tamils secured a fair proportion of the higher administrative posts and a disproportionate share of positions in the clerical grades. As the opportunities for public sector employment dwindled due to stagnant economic conditions in the 1950s and as aspirants for public sector employment among the Sinhalese increased, communal antagonisms between the two communities heightened. A feeling developed among Sinhalese seeking entry into the public services that the Ceylon Tamils in positions of authority in the Government service were discriminating in favour of their compatriots.<sup>51</sup> This strengthened the hands of the proponents of Sinhalese as the only official language.

The Official Language Commission which was appointed to study the necessary procedure to be followed to make the national languages as official languages, issued their final report in 1953. The chairman of the commission

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51. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 47.

E.A.L. Wijeyewardene, in a rider attached to the report favored one official language instead of two.<sup>52</sup> The following year the Commission on Higher Education in the National Languages was appointed. Again the chairman of this commission E.A.L. Wijeyawardene in a rider to the report of the commission had the same observation to make.<sup>53</sup> This provided an impetus to the Sinhalese-only movement.

The language controversy gained momentum when the then Prime Minister Sir John Kotalawala (1953-1956) announced in Jaffna at a reception, that he would take necessary steps to amend the constitution to give parity of status to the Tamil language with the Sinhalese language. The reaction to the Prime Minister's statement in the Sinhalese areas was intense. It stiffened the determination of the Sinhalese to make their language the sole official language.

Under growing pressure for "Sinhala only" in the Sinhalese-speaking areas, the SLFP, after a reexamination of its language policy changed its stance in 1955. from official status for Sinhala and Tamil to Sinhalese only with due recognition to Tamil. In the following year

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52. E.A.L. Wijeyewardana, "Rider" in Final Report of the Commission on Higher Education in the National Languages (Sinhalese and Tamil) (Ceylon: Government Press-July 1956) p. 217.

53. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 74.

the UNP at its annual convention passed a resolution that Sinhalese only should be made the official language of Sri Lanka.

The Tamils were greatly alarmed about the development in the Sinhalese areas and feared that they were being forced to abandon their own cultural tradition and separate identity. The FP viewed the demand for Sinhala only and later the adoption of Sinhalese as the only official language, as a threat to the separate existence of the "Tamil nation." From its inception the FP leaders had cautioned the Tamils about the language policies of the "Sinhalese parties" and its leader Chelvanayakam in 1948 had forecast that the next step in the process of "destroying" the Tamil minority would be legislation to make Sinhalese the sole official language. The FP therefore included in its platform the demand for parity of status for the Tamil language with Sinhalese language.

The demand for citizenship rights for the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka

The political problems relating to citizenship of people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka really began with the Donoughmore Commission's recommendation for universal suffrage in 1931, which provided voting rights to all British subjects including the Indian immigrant population in Sri Lanka. But A.J. Wilson has observed that: "its origin could be traced back to the reluctance of the



Sinhalese to take to the regimented life of the estates."<sup>54</sup> Consequently Indians were brought to Sri Lanka by the British to work in commercial plantations from the mid nineteenth century. W.H. Wriggins has noted that:

Between 1871 and 1891 - during coffee boom - 24,000 new immigrants arrived each year and again, between 1891 and 1900 - when tea planting expanded very rapidly - 34,000 more came annually. These migrations added 10 per cent to total population....<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the plantation workers, there were other Indians who came to Sri Lanka in search of employment and business opportunities in the urban areas.

The Sinhalese, especially those of the central highlands, the Kandyan Sinhalese, opposed the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission because the enfranchisement of the Indian population would have definitely diluted their electoral strength. Further there was the fact of economic rivalries between Indian and Sinhalese traders. As a result, the Colonial Office in 1931 proposed a compromise settlement as an interim measure. Under this there were three ways by which the franchise could be obtained: "(i) by the 1924 system which enfranchised property owning British subjects (largely Europeans);

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54. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, pp. 28-29.

55. W. Howard Wriggins, Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960) pp. 214-215.

(ii) by domicile, designed for the old established population; and (iii) by certificate of permanent settlement, for Indian settlers."<sup>56</sup> Due to deliberate governmental restriction in registering Indians in the late 1930s the number of Indian voters declined from 225,000 in 1939 to 168,000 in 1943.<sup>57</sup> However with increase of constituencies in 1947, under the Soulbury Constitution, the Indian Tamils were able to elect seven of their members to parliament.

Following independence the UNP Government enacted a series of legislative measures designed to restrict the grant of citizenship and franchise rights in 1948 and 1949; (i) the Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948; (ii) Indian and Pakistani (Citizenship) Act No. 3 of 1949; and (iii) the Ceylon Parliamentary Election Amendment Act No. 48 of 1948. "The sum effect of all these three Act was" as A.J. Wilson observed:

(1) to disfranchise the overwhelming majority of Indians who had up to date possessed the right to vote, and (2) to make it extremely difficult for those Indians and Pakistanis who wished to become citizens to qualify.<sup>58</sup>

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56. I.D.S. Weerawardane, "Minority Problems in Ceylon" in Pacific Affairs (Vol XXV, No. 3, Sep. 1952), p. 284.

57. Ibid., p. 284.

58. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, pp. 30-31.

Government spokesmen in justifying these laws, argued that the Indians had no permanent interest in the country. They further insisted that the Indians not only maintained connections with their families and relatives in India but that they also periodically visited their families in India and remitted money to them. The Ceylon Indian Congress organized, without much success, passive resistance to these laws. Indians were called upon to boycott the registration procedure for citizenship provided under the act.

The leaders of the FP regard the Indian Tamils as allies in their agitation against the "Sinhalese domination". They often argue that one of the reasons for their emergence as a separate force was their decision to agitate for citizenship rights for the Indian Tamils. The Party is of the opinion that the citizenship laws were part of the general strategy of the UNP to "destroy" the strength of the Tamil speaking people in Sri Lanka. The FP has therefore demanded the amendment of the citizenship law so as to grant citizenship to enable persons of Indian origin with an abiding interest in the island.

The Demand For The Immediate Cessation of the State Aided Colonization Schemes.

The state aided colonization schemes were started in Sri Lanka, mainly due to the efforts of D.S. Senanayake in 1934, the then Minister of Agriculture. These schemes

were started for a number of economic reasons such as increasing landlessness, growing population, mounting unemployment and the general economic depression which affected the country's export economy in the 1930s.<sup>59</sup>

The Dry Zone of Sri Lanka means "the whole of Northern and Eastern parts of island with the exception of the hillier areas,"<sup>60</sup> which comprise about two thirds of Sri Lanka's land area. Historically this Dry Zone was the centre of the ancient Sinhalese civilization except for specific areas, which have been populated by Ceylon Tamils for a very long time. These areas are the Jaffna peninsula and its suburbs and the eastern coast of the island.

With the decline of the Rajarata Kingdom in the North-Central Province with Anuradhapura as its capital, these areas were abandoned by their inhabitants for a variety of reasons. Malaria proved a killer. Major irrigation works were not maintained with the collapse of the Rajarata Kingdom. Soil erosion could still have been another reason.

Two important economic problems of the country might have prompted the policy makers of the time to open up

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59. B.H. Farmer, "Peasant Colonization in Ceylon" in Pacific Affairs (vol xxv, No. 4, December 1952), p. 391.

60. Ibid., p. 389.

these colonization schemes. Firstly, Sri Lanka is to a great extent dependent for its food on foreign countries. A major part of her export income has consequently been spent on buying food items. Attempts were made through these colonization schemes to encourage peasants to grow more food. A second factor motivating transfer of population to the newly opened colonization schemes was pressure of population and landlessness.

A Land Development Ordinance introduced in 1935 required the government to advertise areas which were available for colonization. The lands were given on lease, not outright so as to prevent the peasant settlers from misusing them for other purposes.<sup>61</sup> W.H. Wriggins noted that:

From 1945 to 1955, nearly 20,000 acres of dry zone land had been opened for cultivation and some 100,000 people had found new homes ....<sup>62</sup>

At the early stages, five acres of paddy and three acres of high land were given to a large family. The amount of land for a single family was later reduced to three acres of paddy and two acres of high land, because it was found that the earlier allotments were too large to be managed

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61. Ibid., pp. 392-393.

62. W.H. Wriggins, Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation, pp. 292-293.

by a family. By 1963, allotments were reduced to two and one acre respectively due to the increasing demand for land.<sup>63</sup>

It so happened that a number of these schemes were started in the Tamil-speaking areas or in areas close to those inhabited by the Ceylon Tamils. For this reason the FP opposed the schemes alleging that in the course of time, Sinhalese settlers in these schemes could reduce the parliamentary representation of the Ceylon Tamils. The FP leadership argued that these schemes would convert the Ceylon-Tamil majority areas into Sinhalese majority areas. R.N. Kearney has pointed out that:

... between 1946 and 1948 the proportion of Sinhalese to the rest of the population in the Tamil-speaking eastern province increased from 7.8 to 11.6 percent while the number of Ceylon Tamils declined from 46.5 to 40.00 percent.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, the FP from 1949 onwards opposed these colonization schemes as being deliberate plan of the UNP government of the time to contract the territories of the Tamil-speaking people and ultimately to destroy what little political power the Tamils had. The Party maintained that:

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63. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 77.

64. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 98.

The Gal Oya Scheme in the southern part of the [Eastern] Province, the Allai Scheme in the Central part, and the Kantalai and Padanya Schemes in the Northern part on the attainment of complete fruition, will without doubt enable all the seven constituencies of the Province return Sinhalese members.<sup>65</sup>

At the annual convention of the FP in 1956, the Party President pointed out that "thousands of landless peasants clamour for land within their traditional homelands, the government ignores their claims and chooses to bring in Sinhalese from distant places."<sup>66</sup> The FP for all these reasons demands the immediate cessation of these state aided colonization schemes.

#### AN OVERVIEW

An assessment of the FP's standing in Sri Lanka's politics must take two important aspects of the party into consideration, namely (i) its objectives: policies and programmes, and (ii) its representative character: which section of the Tamil-speaking people does it represent.

The basic objectives of the FP, as we noted earlier are directly concerned with the preservation of the separate existence of the Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka. The party came into being in order to safeguard

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65. Federal Party of Ceylon, Ceylon Faces Crisis, p. 17.

66. C. Vanniasingham, Presidential Address, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi Annual Convention (Jaffna: Sri Lanka Printing Works, 1956), p. 10.

the interests of these people. Its preoccupation with these objectives prevented it from formulating clear-cut economic and social programmes of its own. For instance, the party's Election Manifesto in 1960 declared that it would "support all progressive measures in the economic and social sphere introduced by any government in office."<sup>67</sup>

The party however presented its economic objectives in detail when it submitted a memorandum on the constitution to the Steering Committee of the Constituent Assembly in 1971. Article 51, subsections (a) and (b) of the memorandum advocated the abolition of exploitation of man by man and the elimination of capitalistic exploitation and monopolies. While Article 52 stated that:

The economic activity and life of the Republic ... shall be determined by a national economic plan drawn up from time to time by a Commission consisting of representatives from Central Government .... appointed by the President.<sup>68</sup>

The failure of the party to present a national economic and political programme in the early years and its exclusive identification with the Tamil-speaking people

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67. Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Election Manifesto, March 1960 (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1960) p. 1.

68. The Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi, Memorandum on the Constitution submitted to the Steering Committee of the Constituent Assembly (Chunnakam, Sri Lanka: Thirumakal Press n.d) pp. 19-20.



has led to it being stigmatised as a "communal party" by some observers. The term "communal" needs clarification here, because it has been used indiscriminately by some scholars<sup>69</sup> to describe the party creating thereby a certain amount of confusion. W.H. Wriggins observed that in a broader sense those who "identify with one another politically along regional, ethno-linguistic, religious, caste and clan lines"<sup>70</sup> for political action could be considered as "communal" groups. Kearney defined the term "communalism" as an "attitude which emphasizes the primacy and exclusiveness of the communal group and demands the solidarity of members of the community in political and social action."<sup>71</sup> According to these observations, all political parties in Sri Lanka (including the traditional left parties, the LSSP and the CP after 1964) could be considered as "communal" parties, with the exception of the LSSP (R) and the CP (Peking). Since 1956, the UNP and the SLFP have been advocating the solidarity of the Sinhalese community for their political programmes. The pro Sinhala

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69. Woodward, Growth of a Party System in Ceylon, p. 250.

70. W.H. Wriggins, "Problems of Communalism in South Asia" in The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, (New Series vol. iv, Nos. 1 & 2, December 1975), p. 134.

71. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the politics of Ceylon, p. 5.

Buddhist policies of these two parties and their anti-Tamil propoganda in the Sinhalese areas, especially during the election campaigns, prove that these parties too could be considered "communal" parties.

On the other hand, this is not a particular phenomenon peculiar to Sri Lanka's politics. It is present in all multi-ethnic societies whether they are developed or underdeveloped. The only noticeable difference is that ethnic conflicts in the developed societies do not always end in open conflict. Wriggins argued that "contemporary ethnic politics in the United States or the re-emergence of regional sub-nationalism in Scotland, Wales or Quebec"<sup>72</sup> indicated communal awareness among these groups. He further pointed out that "those of us who know the "communal" problems of New York, Chicago, Detroit or London cannot point the finger in praise or blame."<sup>73</sup>

It is not relevant for our purpose that the FP is a communal party. The important consideration is that it advocates the solidarity of the Tamil-speaking people. The FP in appealing to the Tamil-speaking people asked them for their support in their campaigns to obtain

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72. Wriggins, "Problems of Communalism in South Asia" in The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, op. cit., p. 134.

73. Ibid., p. 143.

recognition for the rights of the Tamil-speaking minority in Sri Lanka.

Germane to the above description is the criticism that the party has alienated the Tamil-speaking people from the mainstream of national politics. It has been alleged that the FP has diverted the attention of the Tamil masses from the pressing national problems of the country such as those of economic development and national unity.<sup>74</sup> It is true that the FP has continuously emphasized language and such related problems as the colonization of the Tamil-speaking areas with Sinhalese people. But the party spokesmen regard these as of utmost relevancy. One FP MP explained the party's stand in the following terms: "We speak often and repeatedly about language because that is so fundamental to us. Language today is the basis for our culture and our nationality."<sup>75</sup> However the party has also been always ready to co-operate in furthering the economic development of the country on the basis of fair treatment being accorded to Tamil-speaking people. As Woodward commented "despite its periodic withdrawal, the FP has been instrumental in maintaining a political association between Ceylon Tamils and Sinhalese

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74. Ceylon Communist Party's Programme, "Thesia Sirupanmai Inangalum Naddin Jananayaka Munnattamum" (Unpublished leaflet, Matara Convention - 1975), p.2.

75. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 97.

through the nexus of the party system."<sup>76</sup> The FP's participation in the "National Government from 1965 to 1968 is an example of the party's co-operation with a major party in promoting economic development and national unity. However, in the case of national unity the FP maintains that only after a satisfactory solution of the problems of minorities could the true national unity be achieved.

We shall now turn our attention to the second aspect of our assessment of the FP: which section of the Tamil-speaking people does it represent? The Marxist parties (the LSSP and the CP) have criticized the FP as the party of the Tamil capitalist and landowning classes.<sup>77</sup> They maintain that the FP was always ready to collaborate with the Sinhalese capitalist parties like the UNP. Until the emergence of the FP as a dominant force in the Tamil-speaking areas in 1956, Tamil politics had been dominated by landowners, urban professionals and retired public servants. The FP drew its support from Tamil public servants, members of local government bodies, the peasants and the English-educated Tamil intelligentsia. Further the Tamil Clerical Service Trade Union has supported the party throughout the years and the party had built a Trade Union of its own among Ceylon Transport Board employees in the Northern

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76. Woodward, "The Party System in Comparative Perspective: An Assessment" in The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies (New Series, vol. iv, Nos. 1 & 2 December 1975), p. 152.

77. Ceylon Communist Party, "Thesia Sirupamai Inangulam Naddin Jananayaka Munnettammum", p. 2.

and Eastern Provinces. In fact it represents a cross section of the Tamil-speaking people.

However, the Marxist parties maintain that the FP had opposed progressive measures adopted by the Bandaranaike governments (1956-65) such as the nationalization of the British naval base at Trincomalee, the island's bus service and government aided private schools as well as the Republican Constitution of 1972.<sup>78</sup> It is correct that the FP opposed these measures, but the party maintains that it opposed these measures for different reasons. According to the party it opposed the nationalization of the naval base at Trincomalee because in spite of the fact that the Trincomalee being a traditionally Tamil-speaking area, the Bandaranaike Government failed to consult the party before taking this measure as it affected Tamil interests in a Tamil majority town. It opposed the nationalization of the bus services and private schools, because the party felt that the state sponsored corporations would reduce the job opportunities of the Tamils. It further feared that the government would discriminate against the Tamil schools in the allocation of funds. In the case of the Republican Constitution the FP opposed only those sections of the Constitution which failed to recognize

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78. Ibid., p. 2.

the political rights of the Tamil-speaking people and the sections on unitary form of government. In fact, the model Constitution submitted by the FP in 1971 advocated a Republican Constitution based on federal principles.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the FP is a party dedicated to the interests of the Tamil-speaking people as a whole, and not to any particular section of those people. Its policies and programmes are formulated for such purposes. The FP originated as a by-product of the Tamil nationalism which emphasize the separate identity of the Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka an idea fostered by leaders like Sir P. Ramanathan and later by G.G. Ponnambalam. In turn the FP appealed to the national consciousness of the Tamil-speaking people. C.A. Woodward observed that "parties are highly adaptive and responsive organisms, shaping, and in turn shaped by, the environment in which they act."<sup>79</sup> The FP is a product of the inevitable political environment of Sri Lanka in the late 1940s and from 1956 onwards it shaped the course of Tamil politics in Sri Lanka.

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79. Woodward, "The Party System in Comparative Perspective: An Assessment", The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, (New Series Vol. IV, Nos. 1 & 2, December 1974), p. 144.

## CHAPTER III

### THE STRATEGY OF THE FEDERAL PARTY IN OPPOSITION (1956-65)

#### FORMULATION OF THE FP'S STRATEGY AND GANDHIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

The general election of 1956 in Sri Lanka has been described by historians as well as political scientists as a turning point in the history of Sri Lanka, a social revolution, and a dividing line in Sri Lanka's recent political development.<sup>1</sup> According to these views the party that represented the English-educated and the wealthy such as the land owners, and the business and professional classes was defeated by a coalition representing the underprivileged - the Sinhalese-educated and indigenous oriented classes. However, Ludowyk and Fernando<sup>2</sup> maintain that the election of 1956 did not alter the kind of ruling class that existed in 1948. Both argue that even after

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1. See for example. Sinnappa Arasaratnam, Ceylon (New Jersey) Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 26. See also A.J. Wilson, Electoral Politics in an Emergent State. The Ceylon General Election of May 1970 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 22.

2. E.F.C. Ludowyk, The Modern History of Ceylon (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), pp. 238-239. See also Tissa Fernando, "Elite Politics in the New States: The Case of Post-Independence Sri Lanka", in Pacific Affairs (vol. 46, No. 3, Fall 1974), pp. 371-374.

the 1956 election political power remained in the hands of the English-educated elite.

The United National Party (UNP) which had controlled political power in Sri Lanka since independence was rejected by the voters at the 1956 general election in favour of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP: People's United Front), a coalition which comprised S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), Phillip Gunawardane's Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Revolutionary Equal Society Party), the Sinhala Bhasha Peramuna (Sinhalese Language Front) of W. Dahanayake and a group of independents led by I.M.R.A. Iriyagolle. This front was formed shortly before the election and was swept to power in 1956. The MEP obtained an absolute majority (See Table III, p. 77) and formed a new government. The UNP, the LSSP, the CP and the FP formed a diverse opposition. They pursued different policies. Because of its ethnic character, the FP was confined to a permanent minority situation. The party's parliamentary strength was not adequate to influence the policies of government through the normal parliamentary channels. The party therefore decided on a course of extra-parliamentary protest based on Gandhian principles of non-violence. The immediate pretext was the government's decision to introduce the "Official Language Bill" to make Sinhalese the only official language of Sri Lanka.



TABLE III

## Party Positions at General Election, 1956

| Parties               | Candidates | Seats<br>won | %<br>seats | Votes<br>polled | %<br>votes | Votes per<br>candidate |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|------------|------------------------|
| UNP                   | 76         | 8            | 8.4        | 718,164         | 27.44      | 9,450                  |
| MEP<br>(Bandaranaike) | 60         | 51           | 53.7       | 1,045,725       | 39.96      | 17,429                 |
| LSSP                  | 21         | 14           | 14.7       | 274,204         | 10.46      | 13,057                 |
| CP                    | 9          | 3            | 3.2        | 119,715         | 4.57       | 13,302                 |
| LP                    | 4          | 0            | 0.0        | 18,123          | 0.69       | 4,531                  |
| TC                    | 1          | 1            | 1.1        | 8,914           | 0.34       | 8,914                  |
| FP                    | 14         | 10           | 10.5       | 142,036         | 5.43       | 10,145                 |
| TRP                   | 2          | 0            | 0.0        | 387             | 0.01       | 194                    |
| Independents          | 64         | 8            | 8.4        | 289,491         | 11.06      | 4,523                  |
| Total                 | 251        | 95           |            | 2,616,759       |            |                        |
| Total No. of<br>votes |            |              |            | 3,646,579       |            |                        |
| Percentage<br>polled  |            |              |            | 71              |            |                        |

SOURCE: A.J. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 171.

The principle of non-violence as a method of political protest in Sri Lanka politics had its roots in Mahathma Gandhi's civil-disobedience campaigns in the 1920s against the British raj in India. For example, P. Arunachalam as President of the Ceylon National Congress urged that the body to adopt a policy of non-cooperation in order to oppose the constitutional reforms introduced by Governor Sir William Manning in 1921 and 1924. The Congress leadership was however not in favour of Arunachalam's move.<sup>3</sup> The first general election held under the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931 was boycotted by the Ceylon Tamils of the Northern Province as a protest against the abolition of communal representation.<sup>4</sup> Again in 1944, when the Soulbury Commission visited the island to investigate the political situation, the Ceylon National Congress officially boycotted the commission by refraining from giving evidence - the Congress leadership felt that the imperial government had gone back on its understanding.

Following independence, when the UNP government introduced the citizenship legislations of 1948 and 1949 decitizenising the majority of Indian settlers in the island, the Ceylon Indian Congress [CIC] resorted to

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3. K.M. de Silva, "The Ceylon National Congress in Disarray, 1920-1; Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam leaves the Congress" in The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies (Vol II, No. 2, December 1974), p. 101.

4. Sidney D. Bailey, Ceylon (New York: Hutchinson's University Library, 1952)p. 149.

passive resistance.<sup>5</sup> Its efforts however were not successful. Non-violent resistance was effectively employed when Marxists parties organized a hartal in 1953 to protest against the increase of the price of subsidized rice by the UNP Government of the time. The FP too participated and successfully organized the hartal in the Tamil-speaking areas. In 1956, the FP organized a day of mourning on Independence Day (4th February) to mark their Tamil grievances against the UNP government. Following the day of mourning the FP sponsored a hartal to demonstrate the resentment of the Tamils of the Northern and Eastern Provinces to the language policy of the UNP government.

The FP's strategy of non-violent resistance finally took shape in June 1956. On the occasion when the FP working committee met to formulate their strategy, the Party leader Chelvanayakam said:

Satyagraha was the only legitimate and non-violent method available to the Tamil speaking people to win their rights. Violence was just opposite to human culture ....<sup>6</sup>

The strategy formulated by the FP was best elaborated by Chelvanayakam during the debate on the "Official Language

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5. See Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 31.

6. S. Ponniah, Satyagraha: The Freedom Movement of the Tamils in Ceylon (Jaffna: National Printers, 1963) p. 26.

Bill" in the House on 14th June 1956.<sup>7</sup> He said that there were only three ways open for the Tamils to resist the Government's policy. First to rise in revolt, this he rejected as not practicable and an "immoral act". The second option was for the Tamils to surrender. This again he argued the Tamil speaking people were not prepared to do, because it was a morally cowardly position to take. The third method he said, "the method that India adopted under the guidance of Mahathma Gandhi - the Gandhian method".<sup>8</sup>

This statement of the FP leader in the House clearly amplifies why the FP chose the Gandhian method as its strategy in opposition. The FP rejected the violent method not only because it was an immoral act but also because it was not practicable. The limited resources and numerical strength of the Tamils played a key role in choosing the Gandhian method. The FP was in a situation where violence was not practicable while parliamentary methods were not adequate to influence the decisions of Government. The only alternative was therefore the Gandhian method. It is therefore appropriate at this stage to examine the implications of the Gandhian principles of civil resistance.

#### Gandhian Political Thought

In Gandhi's political teachings, as in any system of

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7. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), House of Representatives Official Report (Ceylon: Government Press, June 1956) Columns 1887-1888.

8. Ibid., Column 1888.

political thought, one finds the two essential requirements of political thought, namely (i) "reflection upon the ends of political action and (ii) the means of achieving them".<sup>9</sup> R.N. Iyar has clearly reflected this in the following terms:

Gandhi presents us with a problem, for he had both a vision of the radical transformation of the existing social order and political system and, at the same time, a concern to evolve a revolutionary technique of political action and social change....<sup>10</sup>

In order to examine these two themes in Gandhi's political thought it is relevant first to analyse his views on State and Society and then his technique of satyagraha or non-violent resistance.

#### Gandhi's Views on State and Society

Gandhi's views on State and Society are clearly illustrated in his concepts of "(a) human happiness and development, and (b) the place of man in society and the relationship between the two".<sup>11</sup> Gandhi was born to a Vaishnava (a sect in Hindu religion) family and brought up

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9. Joan V. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965) p. 189.

10. Raghavan N. Iyar, "On Gandhi" in Civil Disobedience ed. by Harp A. Freeman and Bayard Rustin (U.S.A: The Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1966) p. 19.

11. Jeyaprakash Narayan, "Gandhi and the Politics of Decentralization" in Gandhi India and the World ed. by Sibnarayan Ray (Melborn: The Hawthorn Press, 1970) p. 237.

in that religious environment. He later came into contact with Jainism, another sect of Hinduism. These two religions had helped Gandhi as a youngster to believe in non-killing, truthfulness and God. But "the two great foundations of his mature thought" as J.P. Narayan has observed, "...Truth (or God) and Non-violence (or Love) came to be developed slowly in the course of the pursuit of his human and social ends."<sup>12</sup> Through his experiences and reasoning in his early life he gradually came to a "higher understanding of God being Truth, and finally, of Truth being God."<sup>13</sup> Gandhi made it clear that non-violence was a means and not an end in itself. The end was man, his well being, happiness and mental as well as material growth. He wrote that: "the supreme consideration is man, the end to be sought is human happiness combined with full mental and moral growth."<sup>14</sup> From his teachings one can understand that at the centre of Gandhi's thinking was man and it was a view of man as a moral creature. As Morris-Johns commented, "For Gandhi..., the relevance and the justification of politics is an expression of the moral life."<sup>15</sup> He

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12. Ibid., p. 237.

13. Ibid., p. 238.

14. Ibid., p. 238.

15. W.H. Morris-Johns, Mahathma Gandhi-Political Philosopher? in Political Studies (vol. VIII, 1960), p. 19.

judged the state from the qualities of its citizens and believed the state could help or hinder the moral development of its citizens. A close study of Gandhi reveals that for him two very important questions of politics are "obedience to law and the employment of force".<sup>16</sup>

According to Gandhi the state should safeguard the rights and obligations of its citizens. The question of disobedience arises in the case of state which do not fulfill the above purpose. Gandhi was of the view that in the interests of society good citizens can disobey the law in order to maintain a good state. He clearly distinguished between law and morality. The laws of the state must guide citizens on the correct moral path. Thus Gandhi explained his ideal state in the following terms:

Political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representations. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. ... In the ideal state therefore, there is no political power because there is no state. But the ideal is never fully realized in life. Hence the classical statement of Thoreau that that government is best which governs the least.<sup>17</sup>

This statement clearly expresses Gandhi's idea of a best practicable state. He was very suspicious of the state.

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16. Ibid., p. 16.

17. Ibid., p. 19.

He wrote that:

The state represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul but the state is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned away from violence to which it owes its very existence.<sup>18</sup>

Gandhi declined to define the type of state and society he was speaking about. For example he wrote "I cannot say in advance what the Government based wholly on non-violence will be like."<sup>19</sup> But from his writings and speeches one can infer that his ideal society was a stateless democracy based on self-governing autonomous village community. However, he became convinced that a completely non-violent society would not be possible in practice, because every member of society might not reach the necessary moral development. Therefore he declared that:

A government cannot succeed in becoming entirely non-violent because it represents all the people. I do not today conceive of such a golden age. But I do believe in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society.<sup>20</sup>

In a reply to a journalist he explained his new order in which he would like to distribute the power concentrated in New Delhi or in Calcutta and Bombay "among the seven thousand villages of India."<sup>21</sup> Thus a decentralized, self

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18. J.P. Narayan, "Gandhi and Politics of Decentralisation", in Gandhi India and the World., p. 240.

19. Ibid., p. 240.

20. Ibid., p. 240.

21. Ibid., p. 242.



governing village community was the ideal society for Gandhi.

### Gandhi's Technique of Satyagraha

Gandhi's main contribution to the philosophy of politics lies in the technique of satyagraha which he had evolved in the course of his experiments with truth. The literal meaning of the term satyagraha is "clinging to truth". The word satya (Truth) implies love and agraha (firmness) mean force. As to Gandhi, "Truth being God", the term accordingly means, "the way of life of one who holds steadfastly to God and dedicates his life to Him."<sup>22</sup> The attainment of Truth can only be achieved by love or non-violence. Here non-violence serves as a weapon in the hands of a satyagrahi. In an ordinary sense, satyagraha means, resistance of evils through soul force.

In narrow sense satyagraha can take many forms. The prime intention of such a satyagraha is to convert the opponent and make him to realize the righteousness of his cause by inviting suffering on himself. Non-cooperation is one of the many forms satyagraha may take. Here, non-cooperation is not with the one who does evils, but with his evil deeds. Fasting is another form of satyagraha,

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22. Bharatan Kumarappa, "ed. note" in M.K. Gandhi Non-violent Resistance (Satyagraha) (New York: Schocken Books, 1951), p. III.

and it should not be undertaken for any selfish motives. On the contrary, it must be performed for a just cause.

In the political arena, satyagraha takes the form of civil-disobedience. Gandhi became known to the world through his civil-disobedience movements in South-Africa and India. "It is called "civil" because it is non-violent resistance by people who are ordinarily law-abiding citizens.." <sup>23</sup> Civil-disobedience movements should be launched, only when negotiations and the constitutional methods fail to bring a settlement with the Government. They must be mass based and conducted strictly on non-violent principles. A constructive programme must also accompany the civil-disobedience movement in the form of economic assistance to the people. K. Shridharani and J.V. Bondurant have analysed the necessary requirements for satyagraha and civil-disobedience movements systematically and comprehensively. <sup>24</sup> For instance Shridharani observed that:

Satyagraha, as an organized mass action presupposes that the community concerned has a grievance which practically every member of that community feels. This grievance should

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23. Ibid., P. IV.

24. See Krishnalal Shridharani, War Without Violence A Study of Gandhi's Method and Its Accomplishments (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc.), 1972. See also J.V. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict.

be of such large proportions that it could be transformed in its positive side into a "cause" rightfully sacrifice and suffering from the community on its behalf.<sup>25</sup>

J.V. Bondurant presents the steps to be followed in a satyagraha campaign as follows:

- (i) Negotiations and arbitration
- (ii) Preparation for the group for direct action
- (iii) Agitation
- (iv) Issuing of an ultimatum
- (v) Economic boycott and forms of strike
- (vi) Non-cooperation
- (vii) Civil-disobedience
- (viii) Usurping of the function of government
- (ix) Parallel government.<sup>26</sup>

Bondurant explained the conflicting situation and the application of satyagraha in dialectical terms. The first thing for any satyagrahi is to understand the character and circumstances of a conflicting situation and she says, the immediate objective of a satyagraha is to create a new circumstance in which the opposing parties would find a satisfactory solution to their conflict. Bondurant argues, "this is, in the Hegalian terms, an

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25. K. Shridharani, War Without Violence A Study of Gandhi's Method and Its Accomplishments, p. 4.

26. J.V. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, pp. 40-41.

aiming of at synthesis out of the conflict of thesis and antithesis."<sup>27</sup> In essence the satyagraha emphasizes that conflicts can be handled in peaceful circumstances in which the opposing parties respect each others moral values to find a satisfactory solution to their conflict without recourse to violence.

Critics of Gandhian political thought have pointed out some important weaknesses. Firstly, the inconsistencies of Gandhi's teachings. This Gandhi himself admitted to in the following terms:

At the time of writing I never think of what I have said before. My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statements on a given question, but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to me at a given movement.<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, his ideas of decentralization on the basis of village communities have been criticized as irrelevant to a modern technological society. Finally, the major weakness of Gandhi's political thought is the narrow range of its applicability. For example Morris-Jones has raised the following question: "...those parts of Gandhi's political philosophy which penetrate deeply do so only on the narrow front of resistance politics; is this not too narrow a base for a satisfactory political philosophy?"<sup>29</sup>

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27. Ibid., p. 195.

28. W.H. Morris-Johns, "Mahatma Gandhi - Political Philosopher?" in Political Studies (Vol. VIII, 1960) p. 17.

29. Ibid., p. 31.

Arther A. Koestler has commented that "it was a noble game which could only be played against an adversary abiding by certain rules of common decency instilled by long tradition: otherwise it would amount to mass suicide."<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, these scholars who have pointed to the weaknesses of Gandhian political thought have also admitted that Gandhi had developed a new weapon of political change and under certain circumstances, this weapon of satyagraha might be used as an effective instrument to achieve necessary changes in a society.

THE SIT-DOWN PROTEST DEMONSTRATION OF THE FEDERAL PARTY  
IN 1956

Date, duration and locale\*

The sit-down protest demonstration was organized by the FP on 5th June 1956, on the day the "Official Language Bill" was introduced in the House of Representatives by the MEP Government. It commenced at 8.30 A.M. on that day at the Galle Face Green in Colombo, which is located a few hundred yards away from the building of the House

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30. Arthur A. Koestler, Heel of Archilles-Essays 1968-1973 (London: Hutchinson & Co Publishers Ltd., 1974) p. 225.

\* This analysis of FP's non-violent resistance is based on J.V. Bondurant's framework, which she has evolved for her "Analysis of Five Satyagraha Campaigns" in her Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict pp. 45-46.

of Representatives. The demonstration lasted for four and a half hours and was called off at 1.30 P.M. by the FP leader Chelvanayakam on the advice of the police officers.

### Objectives

Background: S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the leader of the SLFP and the main component party of the MEP coalition had pledged that once his party obtain power he would make Sinhalese as the only official language of Sri Lanka within twenty four hours. The Manifesto of the MEP in 1956 stated that while making Sinhalese the only official language of the country, due recognition would be given to the Tamil language through provisions for the reasonable use of Tamil.<sup>31</sup> The first step the MEP Government took to fulfil its election pledge was to introduce the "Official Language Bill". The FP in its election campaign demanded parity of status for the Tamil language with the Sinhalese language. When MEP Government made plans for the introduction of the "Official Language Bill", the FP and the Tamils expected that provisions for the reasonable use of the Tamil language would be included in the Language Bill. But when the Prime Minister discussed the provisions of the proposed bill in the Government Parliamentary group including the provisions for the reasonable use of Tamil,

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31. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 77.

the Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP: the Sinhalese National Liberation Front) made known its strong opposition to these provisions. Outside the Parliamentary group, the Eksath Bhikku Peramuna (E.B.P: United Bhikku Front) vehemently opposed the move. A prominent Sinhalese only proponent and a member the JVP went on a hunger strike on the steps of the House of Representatives as a protest against Tamil language provisions. In the face of this opposition the Prime Minister abandoned the provisions for the use of the Tamil language from the "Official Language Bill."<sup>32</sup>

When the leaders of the FP learned of the Government's decision, they resolved to resort to extra-parliamentary methods of agitation by adopting the Gandhian method of non-violent resistance.

The immediate objective: The immediate objective of the demonstration was to protest against introduction of the Official Language Bill, of Sinhalese only by the MEP Government. The Party President in his Presidential Address later claimed that the demonstration helped "to focus the attention of the world on the language controversy in this country."<sup>33</sup>

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32. Ibid., p. 84.

33. C. Vanniasingham, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Annual Convention 1956, Presidential Address (Jaffna: Sri Lanka Printing Works, 1956) p. 6.

### Participants and Leadership of the Demonstration

All the FP members of Parliament (MPs) and about 200 volunteers participated in the demonstration. The volunteers were selected from among close party supporters. During the debate on the "Official Language Bill" in the House, C. Vanniasingham, the party's deputy leader said that: "many of the satyagrahis were doctors, proctors, advocates, teachers, vice principals of schools and so on."<sup>34</sup> Two other Ceylon Tamil leaders G.G. Ponnambalam and C. Suntharalingam also took part in the demonstration. Chelvanayakam and Vanniasingham were the principal leaders and at the secondary level the FP MPs guided the demonstration.

### Participants and Leadership of the Opposition

As the demonstration was staged against the "Official Language Bill" of the MEP Government, the move was directed against the Prime Minister, members of the Cabinet and the Government Parliamentary group. Those in fact behind the anti-Tamil rioting however was a small section of the Sinhalese community, mostly ex-criminals and hooligans, organized and led by a Junior Minister. Vanniasingham later stated in the House that the miscreants were led by K.M.P. Rajaratna, the Parliamentary Secretary to the

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34. C. Vanniasingham, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) House of Representatives, Official Report (Ceylon: Government Press, 1956) Column. 884.



Ministry of Broadcasting and Information who was also leader of the JVP.

#### Preparation for Action

The decision to stage a demonstration was taken by the working committee of the FP which met in the early part of June in Jaffna. It was kept secret for tactical reasons. The Party confidentially informed other Tamil Party leaders to join the proposed demonstration.

#### Preliminary Action

As a preliminary step, the leader of the Party Chelvanayakam informed the Speaker of the House and the Prime Minister of their intention and asked for their co-operation. The letter written to the Prime Minister contained the following message:

Members of Parliament belonging to our Party will lead a batch of about 200 Satyagrahis to sit on the steps of the Western entrance to the House of Representatives and there they will remain fasting the whole day.<sup>35</sup>

The Prime Minister after consulting the police officers replied to Chelvanayakam that he was unable to allow the satyagrahis into the precincts of the House as he expected that it will disturb the business of the House and lead to a breach of the peace. The Speaker of the House

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35. Ibid., Column. 789.

refused permission because, as he said that "a movement was afoot to stage a counter-demonstration that would almost certainly lead to violence."<sup>36</sup> When permission to demonstrate in the precincts of the House was refused, the FP changed the venue from the House to the Galle Face Green.

#### Action

At 8.30 A.M on 5th June 1956, FP MPs and other volunteers commenced their demonstration by sitting on the Galle Face Green. After some time two prominent Tamil leaders, G.G. Ponnambalam and C. Suntharalingam, not members of the FP, joined the demonstration and left within a few minutes with intention of meeting the Speaker of the House. Another batch of volunteers arrived on the scene at about 10.30 A.M. They all came by the Batticaloa-Trincomalee train from the Eastern Province which arrived unusually late in Colombo on that day. Later the two Tamil leaders returned and took up their positions along with others. Meanwhile, leaders and volunteers had been attacked by a crowd (Sinhalese) that had collected in the vicinity. At about 1.00 P.M. the police authorities advised Chelvanayakam that unless the demonstration was called off, they expect a major attack would take place because the crowd had become impossible to control.

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36. Ibid., Column. 709.

Chelvanayakam consulted with the other leaders and called off the demonstration at 1.30 P.M. Although violence was used by the crowd on the volunteers and leaders, the demonstrators conducted themselves peacefully and remained silent through out the period.<sup>37</sup>

#### Reaction of Opponents

Counter-demonstration: When the FP commenced its demonstration in the morning a large crowd of Sinhalese people had collected near the precincts of the House in thousands under the banner of the lion flag (the Sinhalese national flag). After some time the crowd started moving towards the demonstrators, shouting anti-Tamil slogans in Sinhalese. Thereafter, some members of the crowd went forward and asked the demonstrators whether they could speak Sinhalese. The demonstrators kept quiet and the group started assaulting the volunteers. A member of Parliament (MP) V.N. Navaratnam was the first victim and after him another Tamil speaking MP. M. Musthapha was assaulted. Then another group went forward with a map of Sri Lanka and asked is this how you wish to divide the country. There was no reply. Following this an individual from the advancing group tore away the pole carrying the lion flag and used it to attack Vanniasingham dragging him away. At

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37. Ibid., Columns. 878-887.

about 10.00 A.M., the police intervened and formed a cordon around the demonstrators. Even in the presence of the police stones and brickbats were thrown continuously at the demonstrators. Both Vanniasingham and Amirthalingam were hit by stones. Due to the developing violence the demonstration was called off at 1.30 P.M. The objective of the counter-demonstration was to break up the FP's protest demonstration. It was successful to a limited extent as the FP abandoned its campaign midway.<sup>38</sup>

#### Reaction of the Government

In spite of the demonstration, the House met at 2.00 P.M. as scheduled and the Bill was presented by the Prime Minister to prescribe the Sinhalese language as the one official language of Sri Lanka. The Prime Minister and the Government Party were determined to enact the legislation in question despite fierce opposition from the FP, the TC, the L.S.S.P and the C.P.

#### Results

The demonstration failed to achieve its immediate objective. There was no change in the attitude of the Government Party. On the contrary there were widespread communal riots in the city of Colombo and in the Gal Oya colonization areas in the Eastern Sri Lanka. The Tamils

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38. Ibid., Columns. 885-886.

in the Colombo area were the early victims. Tamil public servants on their way to offices and Tamil passengers de-training in Colombo from the North and East at the principal railway station at Colombo Fort were beaten up by the Sinhalese thugs. Business establishments and private property belonging to the Tamils in Colombo were looted and boutiques were set on fire by hooligans. Tamils were dragged out of public transports and assaulted. Violence spread to the Gal Oya area in the Amparai District where Tamils and Sinhalese live side by side and in the racial clashes, over 100 people were killed on both sides. The military was called in to restore law and order in this area and in Colombo.<sup>39</sup>

The FP leader later claimed that:

the satyagraha showed our grit and determination to resist even unto death and complete destruction, the imposition of Sinhalese...<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, the FP demonstration failed to produce any positive result on the Party's objective vis-a-vis official status for the Tamil language.

THE FEDERAL PARTY'S "MARCH" TO TRINCOMALEE AND THE BANDARANAIKE-CHELVANAYAKAM PACT OF 1957

The enactment of the "Official Language Bill" to make

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39. Ibid., Columns. 854-870.

40. C. Vanniasingham, Presidential Address, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi Annual Convention 1956, p. 6.

Sinhalese the only official language of Sri Lanka by Parliament led to a realization on the part of the FP leaders that their demonstration of June 1956 had failed to produce the desired results. The leaders therefore decided on stronger action and planned accordingly a mass civil-disobedience campaign. With this view and for the purpose of broadening the party's base, the leadership planned a "March" from selected places in the Tamil-speaking areas which would converge on an important township with historical connections on the east coast of Sri Lanka, Trincomalee. FP MPs headed the processions and held meetings at important points to explain to the Tamil-speaking people, the party's programme and the need to oppose the policies of the government. The purpose of the "March" was as explained by the Party President, to (i) symbolize the Tamil people's grim resolve to achieve their objectives, (ii) carry the message of the FP to every corner of the Tamil-speaking areas and to mobilize the people to prepare for the non-violent struggle, (iii) unite the Tamil-speaking people in their effort to achieve their objective and to train the Tamil people to be disciplined in non-violent action, and (iv) make the Tamil people to realize that they belong to one nation.<sup>41</sup>

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41. C. Vanniasingham, Presidential Address, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Annual Convention, 1956 (Jaffna: Sri Lanka Printing Works, 1956), pp. 12-18.

The FP had its annual convention on the 19th August, 1956 in Trincomalee, the destination of their historic "march". At this convention, the important decision of launching a non-violent direct action struggle was adopted and an ultimatum was given to the government to settle the problems of the Tamil-speaking people. The convention declared that unless the Prime Minister and Parliament took the necessary steps to constitute a Federal Union of Ceylon by 20th August 1957, "the Kadchi [Party] will launch direct action by non-violent means for the achievement of this object."<sup>42</sup>

Following the convention, the party concentrated its energy in preparing for the proposed campaigns. In all sixteen constituencies in the two Tamil provinces it established recruiting centres for volunteers willing to take part in the satyagraha and civil-dis-obedience campaign. In those constituencies where party members were not returned, the FP branch leaders took charge of the organization. The volunteers were asked to sign a pledge that they would strictly adhere to the non-violent principle in all their actions. The party also conducted training classes in some of these centres.<sup>43</sup>

As the date of the scheduled satyagraha approached the Prime Minister, realizing the seriousness of the FP's

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42. The Federal Party of Ceylon, Ceylon Faces Crisis, p. 32.

43. Wilson, "Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics" in Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies (Vol. IV, No.2, July 1966) p. 128.

proposed satyagraha and its consequences, invited the FP leaders for negotiations which could possibly lead to a settlement. As a result of discussions between the Prime Minister and the FP leaders a compromise was reached which resulted in a "Pact" on 27th July, 1957. This "Pact" came to be known as the "Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact" (B.C. Pact).

This "Pact" recognized Tamil as the language of a national minority of Ceylon and also the language of administration of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. To meet the FP's demand for an autonomous Tamil state and to end the practice of state aided colonization schemes in the Tamil-speaking areas with Sinhalese people, a compromise was reached for the establishment of "Regional Councils" with powers relating to education, agriculture and other related subjects including the selection of colonist for state sponsored colonization schemes. The Prime Minister also gave an assurance to the FP leaders that he would take the necessary steps to settle the citizenship problem of the people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka. In view of this agreement the FP agreed to call off the threatened satyagraha.<sup>44</sup>

The FP maintained that its pact with the Prime Minister

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44. The Federal Party of Ceylon, Ceylon Faces Crisis, Appendix II, Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Agreement of 26th July, 1957, pp. 33-36.



was only an "interim adjustment". It emphasized that it had not abandoned its ultimate objectives. The "B.C. Pact" might be considered a significant achievement as well as evidence of the success of the party's strategy. Through the pressure of extra-parliamentary agitation, the FP forced the Prime Minister to come to an agreement with its leaders. This pact further provided official recognition of the party's claims.

#### THE ANTI SRI CAMPAIGN OF THE FEDERAL PARTY IN 1958

##### Date, Duration and Locale

The "anti-sri" campaign was launched in Jaffna (the principal town in the Northern Province) on 29th March, 1958 by the FP, as a protest against the use of Sinhala "Sri" lettering on the number plates of the buses sent to the Northern and Eastern Provinces by the government. During 29th to 31st of March the campaign spread to all the Tamil-speaking areas. It ended on 31st March with the arrest of the FP MPs and other participants by the police.

##### Objectives

Background: With the "B.C. Pact" it was hoped by the people that communal tension which had erupted in the country would ease and the situation would come back to normal. But the militant EBP threatened that unless the Prime Minister repudiated the pact it would start a satyagraha on its own. Even the UNP organized a pilgrimage to the Dhalada Maligawa (the temple of tooth relic of

the Buddha) to denounce the "B.C. Pact". It organized rallies against the pact in the Sinhalese areas. The JVP once again was in the forefront of this agitation. In the face of this agitation, the Prime Minister delayed the implementation of the pact.

Meanwhile the Government brought a "Motor Traffic Bill" in Parliament to nationalize the bus service. As a result the bus service was brought under a state owned Ceylon Transport Board. In January 1958, the Minister of Transport decided to use the Sinhala "Sri" lettering for the number plates of all new motor vehicles registered from and after January 1956. Some new buses were sent to Jaffna with this lettering on March 17th. During this debate on the "Sri" and "Anti-Sri" campaign in the House, the Prime Minister insisted that the buses sent to Jaffna were an advantage to the people of the area as there were too many old buses.<sup>45</sup>

The working committee of the FP met on 17th March and decided to launch a campaign against the use of the Sinhala "Sri" on the number plates of the buses sent to the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The leader of the party, Chelvanayakam, was not in favour of the decision, but when the majority decided in favour he too agreed. Amirthalingam, the present leader of the party said that: "as far

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45. Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) House of Representatives. Official Report (Ceylon: Government Press, Vol. 30, No. 45 - 1958) Column. 4499.

as Tamil people are concerned the Sinhalese "Sri" is certainly a symbol of their eternal slavery in this country.."46

Immediate Objective: To oppose the use of the "Sinhalese Sri" lettering on the number plates of the buses sent to the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

#### Participants and Leadership of the Campaign

The FP MPs and about 500 volunteers participated in the campaign on the first day. But from the second day onwards members of the Public (Tamils) also took part in it and it was reported that about 5000 people were involved in this campaign. Tamil school teachers and FP youth Front members actively participated as volunteers in this campaign. "The whole thing was carried out under the personal supervision of responsible leaders."47 The Minister of Transport and a section of police personnel in the North and East were responsible for the adoption of measures against the FP.

#### Preparation for Action

As a first step, a joint meeting was held in Jaffna Esplanade in which representatives of the TC, the LSSP (Northern Province Branch), the CP (Northern Branch) took

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46. A. Amirthalingam, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) House of Representatives Official Report, column 4575.

47. Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), House of Representatives Official Report (Ceylon: Government Press, Vol. 30, No. 45 - 1958), Column 4601.

part along with the FP. A number of influential Tamils also participated. It was decided at this meeting to launch a joint campaign against the use of the Sinhala "Sri" in buses. However, when the campaign commenced on 29th, the CP did not take part.

#### Preliminary Action

The leaders of the FP, Chelvanayakam and Naganathan, met the Minister of Transport in January and requested the Minister to use Tamil "Sri" lettering for the motor vehicles in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. This request was rejected by the Minister as he said that it was against the law. Naganathan appealed to the Minister not to send any "Sri" numbered buses to the North. The Minister agreed and said that if they so desired he would refrain from sending buses with Sinhalese lettering. In spite of this understanding buses were sent to the North with the Sinhala lettering. The Minister of Transport later pleaded that before he could convey his decision to the Transport Board, a certain number of buses had already been sent to the Northern Province.<sup>48</sup>

#### Action

A hartal was organized in the Tamil-speaking areas in the middle of March to protest against the arrival of

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48. Ibid., Column 4601.

Sinhala "Sri" buses in the North and East. Following the hartal, on 29th March the "Anti-Sri" campaign was inaugurated by Chelvanayakam in the Jaffna Esplanade. He replaced Sinhalese letters on motor vehicles with Tamil letters. The TC leader too took part on the first day. The FP MPs from the North travelled to the Esplanade with Tamil "Sri" numbers on their cars. The next stage of the campaign was civil-disobedience. The FP MPs led batches of volunteers in Jaffna town to obliterate the Sinhalese letters on all public transport vehicles. Particular care was taken by the leaders to see that only the Sinhalese "Sri" letter on vehicles were altered.

On 30th March the campaign was extended to the Eastern Province. Again Chelvanayakam initiated the campaign in Batticalo town, the eastern capital and FP MPs from the East following him led volunteers who replaced the Sinhalese letter "Sri" with the Tamil "Sri" on vehicles. On 31st March the campaign spread to almost all the Tamil areas. The campaign was abandoned on 31st with the arrest of the FP MPs and other activists in the campaign. They were kept under detention for one week.

#### Reaction of the Government

The Government tactfully avoided taking any action against the offenders for fear that they would achieve prominence as heroes. But when the campaign reached a stage amounting to disobedience in the Tamil-speaking

areas, the Government had the FP leaders involved arrested. Government spokesmen described the action of the FP as a thoughtless one, started to create disturbances in the country.

### Results

The immediate result of the campaign was that it provoked retaliation against Tamils in the Sinhalese areas.

Vittachi noted that:

Bands of Sinhalese roughnecks ... armed with tar-pails and brushes and brooms ... tarring every visible Tamil letter on street signs, kiosks, name boards, bus bodies, destination boards, name plates on gates and bills posted on the walls.<sup>49</sup>

Another reaction to the campaign was the organized boycott of Tamil shops and boutiques in the Sinhalese areas. This was initiated by Buddhist monks at Attanagala and spread to other places. The final outcome was the repudiation of the "B.C. Pact". The campaign gave the Prime Minister an excuse to abrogate the pact.

### THE FEDERAL PARTY'S VAVUNIYA CONVENTION AND THE RACE RIOTS OF 1958

The FP held its annual convention at Vavuniya (in the Northern Province) after its abortive anti-sri campaign and the abrogation of the pact by the Prime Minister. There were disturbance accompanied by violence at the time

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49. Tarzi Vittachi, Emergency'58 The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots (London: Andre Deutsch, 1958), p. 25.

preparations were being made for the convention. The train carrying FP delegates from Batticaloa (in the Eastern Province) was attacked at Polanaruna railway station by Sinhalese rioters on 22nd May, 1958. On the following day, the Colombo bound Batticaloa train was derailed at Eravoor.

The FP held its convention as scheduled and resolved to launch non-violent direct action as had been planned at its 1956 annual convention. The FP's annual convention was the starting point for Sinhalese-Tamil violence on a scale hitherto unknown in the history of inter-ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. Some 300 to 400 people lost their lives. The Government after initially hesitating, declared an islandwide state of emergency on 28th May. It proscribed the FP and the JVP. FP MPs and other activists were placed under detention. The leader of the JVP was also detained. Shortly afterwards in August 1958, the language bill providing for the "reasonable use" of the Tamil language was presented by the Prime Minister and enacted into law. FP MPs who were under detention refused to participate in the parliamentary proceedings.<sup>50</sup>

#### THE FEDERAL PARTY'S STRATEGY BETWEEN THE TWO GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1960

The party's strategy during this period, in addition to its various extra-parliamentary methods of agitation

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50. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 87.

was to exploit its parliamentary strength in the context of governments being returned to office without stable majorities. An opportunity of this kind presented itself immediately after the general election of March 1960. During this general election campaign, the FP sought a mandate which would empower it to act in the best interests of the Tamil-speaking people. Its leaders appealed to the voters to return a single united party such as itself which could negotiate with one or other of the major Sinhalese parties.

At the general election of March 1960 no party obtained decisive majority (See Table IV, p. 109). The UNP secured fifty of the one hundred and fifty one seats in the House, while the SLFP won forty six. The FP obtained fifteen of the nineteen seats it contested. It therefore held the balance of power and was in a position to decide the fate of the minority government that had been instilled. Both the UNP and the SLFP made overtures to FP. Dudley Senanayake, as the leader of the largest single group in the House, the UNP, had formed the government. The FP, as part of its strategy, presented its "minimum demands" to the Prime Minister which was, in substance, the same as the "B.C. Pact". It made the following demands.

- (i) Establishment of Regional Councils
- (ii) Recognition of the Tamil language as the language of a national minority
- (iii) The amendment of the Ceylon Citizenship Act



TABLE IV

## Party Positions at General Election, March 1960

| Parties                  | Candidates | Seats won | % seats | Votes polled | % votes | Votes per candidate |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|---------------------|
| UNP                      | 127        | 50        | 33.1    | 908,996      | 29.62   | 7,157               |
| SLFP                     | 109        | 46        | 30.5    | 648,094      | 21.12   | 5,946               |
| LSSP                     | 101        | 10        | 6.6     | 332,352      | 10.50   | 3,192               |
| CP                       | 53         | 3         | 2.0     | 141,857      | 4.62    | 2,677               |
| MEP (Philip Gunawardane) | 89         | 10        | 6.6     | 325,832      | 10.62   | 3,661               |
| TC                       | 8          | 1         | 0.7     | 38,275       | 1.25    | 4,784               |
| FP                       | 19         | 15        | 9.9     | 176,492      | 5.75    | 9,289               |
| JVP                      | 2          | 2         | 1.3     | 11,201       | 0.36    | 5,601               |
| LPP                      | 101        | 4         | 2.6     | 125,344      | 4.08    | 1,241               |
| SMP (I.M.R.A Iriyagola)  | 40         | 1         | 0.7     | 24,143       | 0.79    | 604                 |
| SLJP                     | 1          | 1         | 0.7     | 11,115       | 0.36    | 11,115              |
| BBP                      | 2          | 1         | 0.7     | 9,749        | 0.32    | 4,875               |
| Independents             | 167        | 7         | 4.6     | 270,881      | 8.83    | 1,622               |
| Others                   | 80         | 0         | 0.0     | 54,775       | 1.78    | 685                 |
| Total                    | 899        | 151       |         | 3,069,106    |         |                     |
| Total no. of Votes       |            |           |         | 3,724,507    |         |                     |
| Percentage polled        |            |           |         | 77.6         |         |                     |

SOURCE: A.J. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 171.

(iv) Four of the six appointed members to the House to be the representatives of people of Indian origin.<sup>51</sup>

The Prime Minister was not in a position to concede the demands of the FP. His party had strenuously campaigned against the "B.C. Pact". Consequently, the FP voted against the UNP at the division on the Throne Speech. The Senanayake Government suffered a parliamentary defeat. The SLFP as the next largest party believed it would be called upon to form an alternative government. SLFP leaders in their discussions with the FP promised they would implement the policies of the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in respect of the problems of the Tamil minority. Following these discussions, the FP informed the Governor General that it would give its support to a SLFP government. The Governor General however was not satisfied that a stable alternate government would be formed. He therefore had Parliament dissolved on 23rd April, 1960. A general election was fixed for 20th July, 1960.

The FP campaigned in the most favourable circumstances during the July 1960 election. Its spokesmen were able to claim that as a result of a single united Tamil party being

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51. Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) House of Representatives, Official Report (Ceylon: Government Press, Vol. 60, No. 5, 1965), Columns 687-688.

TABLE V

## Party Positions At General Election, July 1960

| Parties                  | Candidates | Seats won | % seats | Votes polled | % Votes | Votes per candidate |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|---------------------|
| UNP                      | 128        | 30        | 19.9    | 1,143,290    | 37.57   | 8,932               |
| SLFP                     | 98         | 75        | 49.7    | 1,022,154    | 33.59   | 10,430              |
| LSSP                     | 21         | 12        | 7.9     | 223,993      | 7.36    | 10,666              |
| CP                       | 7          | 4         | 2.6     | 90,219       | 2.96    | 12,888              |
| MEP (Philip Gunawardane) | 55         | 3         | 2.0     | 102,833      | 3.38    | 1,870               |
| TC                       | 10         | 1         | 0.7     | 46,803       | 1.54    | 4,680               |
| FP                       | 21         | 16        | 10.6    | 218,753      | 7.19    | 10,417              |
| JVP                      | 2          | 2         | 1.3     | 14,030       | 0.46    | 7,015               |
| LPP                      | 6          | 2         | 1.3     | 29,190       | 0.96    | 4,865               |
| Independents             | 39         | 6         | 4.0     | 140,522      | 4.62    | 3,603               |
| Others                   | 6          | 0         | 0.0     | 11,167       | 0.37    | 1,861               |
| Total                    | 393        | 151       |         | 3,042,954    |         |                     |
| Total No. of votes       |            |           |         | 3,724,507    |         |                     |
| Percentage polled        |            |           |         | 75.6         |         |                     |

SOURCE: A.J. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 172.

returned to Parliament, it had been possible for that party to decide the fate of a "Sinhalese government". The party as expected improved its position. It obtained sixteen out of twenty one seats it contested. However, it was no longer in the advantageous position it had been in the House in March 1960, after the July election. The SLFP on this occasion emerged with an absolute majority (See Table V, p. 111) and was therefore able to form a government in its own rights. The FP, nevertheless, now in opposition, hoped that the new government under the premiership of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike would honour the undertaking that her colleagues had given the FP in April 1960.

#### THE SATYAGRAHA CAMPAIGN OF THE FEDERAL PARTY IN 1961

##### Date, Duration and Locale

The satyagraha campaign was launched in Jaffna (the principal town of the Northern Province) by the FP on 20th February, 1961. It spread to four other towns, two in the Northern Province (Mannar and Varuniya) and to two others in the Eastern Province, Batticalo and Trincomalee. It lasted for one month and twenty eight days and ended when the Armed Forces intervened on the order of the SLFP Government on 18th April 1961.

##### Objectives

Background: The FP's hopes that the new SLFP Government would honour the understanding reached between it and the leaders of the SLFP towards settling the Tamil problem

failed to materilize. On the contrary, the new Government began taking steps to implement the official language policy of "Sinhalese only" throughout the country. Sinhalese was declared the language of administration and the language of the court of law all over the country including the Tamil-speaking Northern and Eastern Provinces as of January, 1961. Chelvanayakam, the FP leader, reminded the Prime Minister of the understanding between his party and the SLFP and appealed to her for an opportunity to discuss the problems of the Tamil people. Around the middle of November, 1960 representatives from the FP parliamentary group had talks with the Prime Minister and members of the cabinet. The talks failed to bring any resolution of the problems because the SLFP leaders were not willing to consider the demands of the FP which were essentially based on the "B.C. Pact". When negotiations and parliamentary methods failed to produce a settlement, the FP decided to launch a mass based non-violent direct action campaign in the Tamil-speaking areas. Past experiences prompted the party leaders to confine the campaign to the predominantly Tamil-speaking areas. The Party President in his Presidential Address at 1960 annual convention said that:

We are privileged to live in the epoch of Gandhi who had by precept and practice shown to the world the new and unconventional method of satyagraha .... Our party under the guidance of our leader S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, had adopted this weapon of satyagraha

and Ahimsa ... 52

The Immediate Objective of the satyagraha was to prevent the implementation of Sinhala as the language of administration and courts of law in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. "Its ultimate objective was to bring pressure on the government by non-violent means to make it realise the just demands of the Tamil-speaking people."<sup>53</sup>

#### Satyagraha Participants and Leadership

The FP leader Chelvanayakam inaugurated the campaign with forty to fifty volunteers from his own constituency. They sat in front of the entrances to government offices at the Jaffna Kachcheri (the secretariat of the government in the Northern Province). FP MPs from the North also participated on the first day and they, later in turn, led volunteers from their constituencies of the venue of the satyagraha. In Vavuniya (another town in the Northern Province), T. Sivasithamparam, a TC MP, along with 500 volunteers started satyagraha in front of the Vavuniya Kachcheri on 24th February. On the same day at Mannar (a town in the Northern Province) a demonstration was

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52. S.M. Rasamanikam, Presidential Address, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, 7th Annual Convention (Jaffna: Sri Lanka Printing Works, 1961), p. 14.

53. S. Ponnaiah, Satyagraha: The Freedom Movement of the Tamils in Ceylon, p. 54.

organized by V.A. Alagacone MP and a satyagraha followed the next day. Similarly at Batticaloa and Trincomalee (the principal towns of the Eastern Province) a hartal was sponsored by the FP (Eastern Branch) as a protest against the "police violence" on the satyagrahis in Jaffna, and on 28th February satyagraha commenced in front of the Kachcheris. FP MPs from the East led the satyagraha in these two towns.<sup>54</sup>

As a reaction to police intervention and ill-treatment of the satyagrahis, the number of participants rose from 50 to 500 in Jaffna on the first day. Members of the public rushed to the entrances replacing dislodged satyagrahis. On 27th February, the number of satyagrahis increased to 2000 and by 11th March the number rose to 8000. From around 11th March, some 10000 people participated each day in satyagraha. In Batticaloa, satyagraha started with 600 on the first day and continued to increase as the satyagraha persisted.<sup>55</sup>

There were many farmers among the satyagrahis. Tamil teachers, students and traders took an active part in the demonstrations. Sections of teachers and traders also participated in the satyagraha. Hindu and Christian priests were among the other notable participants. The Tamil-speaking Muslim residents of Jaffna and Batticaloa district organized processions in sympathy with the

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54. Ibid., pp. 56-70.

55. Based on personal interviews with FP leaders.

satyagraha as well as participated in the campaign. Most noteworthy was the fact of Sinhalese residents in Jaffna and Batticaloa participating in the campaign. Great numbers of women and children also took part in the satyagraha campaign. Although leaders from other Tamil parties joined the satyagraha, the leadership of the movement was in the hands of the FP.<sup>56</sup>

#### Opposition to the Satyagraha Campaign

The opposition to the FP's campaign came from the Prime Minister Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike and her chief lieutenant in the Cabinet, the Minister of Finance who was also Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs, F.R. Dias Bandaranaike. The Sri Lanka Police as well as Army and Navy Personnel were deployed against the campaigners. There were besides seven Sinhalese minor employees in Jaffna who attempted to stage a counter satyagraha in the midst of the satyagrahis, on 28th March 1961.

#### Organization

On 24th March, an All-Party Conference was held in Jaffna with the intention of transforming "the Federal Party movement into an All-Party movement to win language

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56. Based on personal interviews with FP leaders.



rights".<sup>57</sup> This conference was convened by the Mayor of Jaffna D.S. Thurairajah and attended by representatives of the TC, the LSSP (Northern Branch) along with the FP. The conference resolved to take steps to strengthen the satyagraha movement. On the same day, in Batticaloa and Trincomalee, FP leaders from the East met and discussed what steps should be taken to start the satyagraha campaign. In April, FP Non-violent Service Corps was organized to maintain order in the campaign.

#### Preparation for Action

In January 1961, the FP arranged a meeting at the Jaffna Town Hall to make plans for non-violent direct action. A great number of Tamil people attended this meeting. At this meeting the line of action the party intended to follow was outlined by Chelvanayakam. He said that:

- (i) Negotiations have failed to bring about a settlement of the Tamil demands.
- (ii) The Federal Party has decided to launch direct action to assert the rights of the Tamil speaking people.
- (iii) The Federal Party would not resort to violence in pursuing direct action. Violence was not in keeping with the culture of the Tamils. Therefore, direct action should be non-violent in character.<sup>58</sup>

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57. S. Ponnaiah, Satyagraha: The Freedom Movement of the Tamils in Ceylon, p. 67.

58. Ibid., p. 52.

Before the commencement of satyagraha, Chelvanayakam issued a statement in which he said that the campaign the FP was organizing, though new to Sri Lanka, had been practiced in India under the guidance of Gandhi against British rule. He drew attention to the necessary elements for the success of such a campaign in the following terms:

- (i) that it is used in support of a just cause,
- (ii) that it is the desire and aspiration of the people,
- (iii) the moral strength and discipline of the campaigners and on those behalf the campaign was organized should be above board.<sup>59</sup>

He argued that the Indian National Congress acted against the laws of that country but their behaviour was considered "moral and patriotic" during the independence movement in India. He added that the FP had decided to follow the example of the Indian National Congress.<sup>60</sup>

#### Preliminary Action

As a first step the party commenced passive resistance to the implementation of the "Sinhala only" Act on 30th January 1961. An appeal was made to every Public Servant, not to co-operate with the government to implement the "Sinhalese only" Act in the Tamil-speaking areas. The appeal among other things contained the following:

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59. Ibid., p. 61

60. Ibid., p. 62.

- (i) Please do not do any work in your office in Sinhala.
- (ii) Please do not attend to any Sinhala official communication.
- (iii) Please do not sign or use a Frank in Sinhala.<sup>61</sup>

The FP achieved a considerable measure of success in this campaign as a majority of Tamil public servants co-operated in the campaign.

#### Action

The FP aimed at disorganizing the working of the Kachcheris (Secretariat of the Government) by their action. They sought to prevent government servants from entering their office as a method of obstructing the implementation of Sinhalese only legislation in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. This action "brought governmental activity to a virtual standstill throughout the Tamil areas."<sup>62</sup>

#### Demonstrations

Tamil students from the North and East were in the forefront in organizing demonstrations to mark their sympathy for the satyagraha. As a protest against police violence on satyagrahis on the first day, students from leading schools in the North marched in procession. It

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61. Ibid., p. 52.

62. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 110.

was reported<sup>63</sup> that about 5000 male and female students participated in the procession on 21st February 1961. Similarly, on 3rd of March in Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Mannar, Tamil students organized demonstrations against "police violence". Teachers from Batticaloa and Jaffna, protesting against the circular of the Director of Education, instructing them not to participate in the satya graha, went in procession and joined the satyagraha on 4th and 11th March respectively. The traders association and the lawyers from North and East organized demonstrations on 8th March in sympathy with satyagraha. The processions of the farmers from all parts of the Jaffna peninsula were a continuous feature throughout the period of satyagraha.<sup>64</sup>

#### Contravention of Selected Laws-Civil-disobedience

The Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike made a speech over the radio on 25th March, asking the FP to withdraw the satyagraha stating that "... my government is ready and willing to listen to their grievances and make adjustments where necessary after due consideration."<sup>65</sup> The FP indicated its readiness to negotiate. Due to the initiative of private citizens, the government nominated the Minister of Justice to open negotiations with the FP.

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63. S. Ponniah, Satyagraha: The Freedom Movement of the Tamils in Ceylon, p. 111.

64. Ibid., pp. 110-117.

65. Ibid., p. 131.

On 5th April, the Minister of Justice and the FP leaders had talks on the problems of the Tamils. But these failed to produce any settlement.

When the negotiations failed, the FP decided to step up its campaign by resorting to civil-disobedience. In defiance of the postal law the party established its own "Postal Service". This action was taken in breach of the postal laws with the aim of forcing the government to take punitive action. "The Federal Party Postal Service" was inaugurated in the Pension Branch Office opposite to the main Kachcheri building by Chelvanayakam on 14th April. "The "post office" sold some 2500 stamps and stamped envelopes and 3000 post cards, in a little more than an hour."<sup>66</sup> M. Sivasithamparam, MP informed the Superintendent of Post and Telegraphs, Jaffna, by letter that the FP had started its own postal service. This letter was delivered by Amirthalingam. Similar letters were written to the Superintendent of Police and Government Agent, Jaffna, by Sivasithamparam and Mrs. M. Amirthalingam. As the next stage of civil-disobedience, the FP "Postal Service" was extended to Kankesanthurai electorate by Chelvanayakam and in that electorate altogether twelve post offices were opened. The FP appointed one of its leading members as Postmaster-General incharge of the postal service. "Shortly afterwards plans were announced

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66. Ibid., p. 146.

by the party to alienate crown lands to deserving applicants and to organize a police force."<sup>67</sup>

#### Reaction of the Government

Police action on the first day of the satyagraha: The satyagraha started by the FP with only about 50 volunteers became a mass movement, mainly due to police intervention and "ill treatment" of the satyagrahis on the first day. In an effort to clear the entrances of the Kachcheri, the police used more violence than was necessary. This roused the feelings of the Tamil people and the ordinary Tamil people who had not taken much interest in the satyagraha began to participate in the campaign.

The Government action against the satyagraha: During the FP's satyagraha the government authorities refused to issue orders for the distribution of rice (which is the staple food of Sri Lankans) in the Tamil-speaking areas. They insisted that the distributors must call over at the residence of the Government Agent (which is located in the Kachcheri premises). If the distributors called over, it would have meant the Kachcheri should have to function. But the distributors declined to comply. Government took this as an excuse and suspended the distribution of subsidised rice to consumers. For the same reason, salary

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67. Wilson, "The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics" in Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies (Vol. IV, No. 2, July 1966), p. 129.

and pension payments were suspended in the Tamil-speaking areas. FP leaders alleged that this was an attempt by government "to bring economic pressure to bear on the Tamil population."<sup>68</sup>

Counter-satyagraha: On 28th March 1961, in Jaffna, seven Sinhalese minor-government employees, attempted to stage a counter-satyagraha in the midst of the satyagrahis. This attempt was later abandoned due to intervention by the Sinhalese Chief Priest of Naga Vihara who persuaded the counter-satyagrahis to abandon their plan.

Violent repression of the satyagraha: When the FP mounted its civil-disobedience campaign by establishing a "Postal Service" of its own, the cabinet met at the Prime Minister's residence on 17th April and decided to impose an emergency in the areas affected by the FP's satyagraha. Following this decision, the Minister of Finance F.R. Dias Bandaranaike (who was also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs) conferred with the chiefs of the Armed Forces. Instructions were issued to the Army to suppress the satyagraha and additional Army units were sent to Jaffna. Reinforcements arrived in Jaffna on the morning of 18th April.<sup>69</sup>

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68. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 110.

69. Ponniah, Satyagraha: The Freedom Movement of the Tamils in Ceylon, pp. 148-149.

Under emergency regulations, police officers arrested MPs who were participating in the satyagraha in front of the Kachcheri. After the arrest of the leaders, Army personnel began assaulting unarmed satyagrahis with a view to clearing the blocked entrances of the Kachcheri. Ponnaiah noted that "the Army fell on the innocent and peaceful satyagrahis like wolves in the fold and brutally attacked them with belts, rifle-butts and clubs ..." <sup>70</sup> As a result, a number of satyagrahis were seriously wounded. M. Sivasithamparam, MP was one among them who sustained injuries. The FP's "Post Office" was smashed.

### Results

With the declaration of a state of emergency for FP MPs along with other Tamil notables involved in the campaign were placed under detention. The FP was proscribed. The campaign which disrupted the administration in the Northern and Eastern Provinces for a month and 28 days had now to be abandoned. The campaign had failed to produce any positive results since the government was unwilling to make changes in the Official Language Act. In this sense the campaign was a failure. However, Ponniah recorded the feeling of the Tamil youth in the following terms "Civil Government has failed and military rule established. To this extent our satyagraha is a success." <sup>71</sup> On the

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70. Ibid., p. 149.

71. Ibid., p. 153.



government side it was alleged that:

... the Federal Party had challenged the lawfully established government of the country and had sought to establish a separate administration. ...the Federal Party started a Postal Service and established their own Police Force. They also decided to set up land Kachcheris of their own to allot Crown land to their supporters.<sup>72</sup>

#### THE FEDERAL PARTY'S "TAMIL ONLY" CAMPAIGN IN 1964

After a long period of detention, the FP leaders and others were released in October, 1961. In the following May, Chelvanayakam urged Tamil public servants and students to refrain from studying the Sinhalese language. However, the party did not engage in any large scale agitation till 1964. The leaders were physically and financially exhausted after their satyagraha campaign and their period of detention. However in early 1964, the FP commenced its "Tamil only" campaign. Party leaders appealed to the Tamil public to transact all their business with the government in Tamil language only. The party achieved a considerable measure of success because this campaign caused problems in the administrative system. The vast majority of Sinhalese public servants were not proficient in the Tamil language.<sup>73</sup>

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72. C.P. de Silva, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), House of Representatives, Official Report (Vol. 42, No. 27, 1961), Column 4047.

73. Based on the interviews with FP leaders.

## AN EVALUATION OF FEDERAL PARTY'S STRATEGY IN OPPOSITION

This evaluation of the FP's strategy in opposition will seek answers to three important questions: (i) how far was the FP successful in its objective of following the strategy of extra-parliamentary agitation based on Gandhian principles?, (ii) to what extent was it successful in exploiting its parliamentary strength in the context of governments returned to office without stable majorities?, and (iii) what could be the explanation for its failure, on occasion, to achieve its objectives?

Although the FP adopted Gandhian technique of satya graha as its main strategy in opposition, it did not adopt Gandhi's political philosophy as its ideology. "A basic part of satyagraha in Gandhi's view was" as Gene Sharp has observed, "a constructive programme to build a new social and economic order through voluntary constructive work."<sup>74</sup> The FP neither had nor has any such programme. Perhaps, the absence of any such programme is the main weakness of the party. Gandhi regarded this as more important than resistance. Our analysis of the FP's campaign shows that the FP used the Gandhian method only as a temporary weapon. But, "Gandhi became convinced that satyagraha based on inner conviction was more effective than non-violence

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74. Gene Sharp, "The Meaning of Non-violence" A Typology (revised)" in Conflict Resolution (Vol. III, 1959), p. 58.

practised as a temporary policy."<sup>75</sup>

The balance sheet on the strategies and achievements of the FP shows that on the credit side its only worthwhile achievement was the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957. Although this pact was later repudiated by Bandaranaike in April, 1958, it recognized the claims of the FP and provided some legitimacy for its future agitations. Next to this pact, the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958 was a credit. This Act provided the use of the Tamil language for administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces as well as, as a medium of instruction and examination. However, it can be argued that this legislation was not entirely the outcome of the FP's agitation. The MEP Government itself realised the necessity for such legislation and its policy on this was stated in the Manifesto of the MEP in 1956.

The next item on the credit side is the Sirimavo-Sasthri Pact of 1964 (Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964), which attempted, at least partly to settle the citizenship problems of the people of Indian origin. This again cannot be solely attributed as an outcome of the FP's campaigns. But the agitation of the FP it might be insisted fervored the government of the day to take early steps to settle the problem with the Indian government. Another achievement

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75. Ibid., p. 58.

of the party during this period was that the policy of colonizing the traditionally Tamil-speaking areas with Sinhalese people was not pursued by the governments. Except for these four accomplishments, there is nothing that could be considered as a substantial achievement of the party in opposition. However, the FP claims a long list of achievements during this period.

A party publication<sup>76</sup> in 1965 claimed that: through parliamentary and extra-parliamentary agitations, the party has been able to bring the problems of the Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka before world public opinion; (ii) The FP had created the circumstances and prepared the Tamil speaking people to "fight" for their rights; (iii) For the first time the party had united the Tamil people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and helped to reduce religious and caste differences among the Tamil people; (iv) The party had changed the Tamil politics and its leadership to a mass based one; (v) the party has been an instrument for the renaissance of the Tamil language, Arts and Music in Sri Lanka, (vi) The party has the record of continuous agitation against "Sinhalese imperialism", and (vii) the party has been an instrument for the growth of political consciousness among the Tamil people.

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76. Karikalan, Ean Thamilar Arasu? (Jaffna: Ilan Thamilar Pathipakam, 1965), pp. 48-54.

The above claims of the party have to be judged in the light of its achievements outside the parliamentary arena in terms of its basic objectives. The FP through its extra-parliamentary agitations has in a way uncovered the problems of the Tamil speaking people of Sri Lanka to the outside world. For instance, in May 1973, the International Commission of Jurists had requested the FP leader Chelvanayakam to submit a report on discrimination against the Tamil minority and their situation in Sri Lanka for a study on "Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities" by the United Nations Sub-commission."<sup>77</sup>

The party also through its propaganda and campaigns has been educating the Tamil speaking people on the problems facing them. Its non-violent campaigns had prepared the Tamil speaking people to fight for their political rights. As the FP claims it has changed the character of Tamil politics from an elite based one to a mass base, through its frequent appeals to the Tamil-speaking people to participate in its campaigns. The FP's youth organization form yet another articulate body in Tamil politics. Further through the party's efforts the Tamil-speaking people have taken more interest in their language and cultural activities during the last two decades. However,

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77. Tamil United Front of Ceylon, A Memorandum on Discrimination submitted to The International Commission of Jurists (Jaffna; St. Joseph's Catholic Press, 1973),

in its attempt to unite the Tamil speaking people in Sri Lanka, the party did not achieve complete success. This was mainly due to the fact that the Tamil speaking Muslims have not been in favor of the party's policy of federalism.

The FP had failed to achieve anything by using its second strategy between the two general elections in 1960. However, on certain occasions it helped the opposition to defeat minority governments. In 1959, the party by using its voting strength in the House, helped the opposition to defeat the unpopular minority government headed by W. Dahanayake. In 1960, the Senanayake government was defeated mainly because the FP voted against the UNP with the opposition at the division on the Throne Speech. Again in 1964, the support of the FP was crucial in defeating the SLFP-LSSP coalition government. In this context Wilson has observed that:

On at least four occasions since 1956 the support of the Federal Party has been solicited by Sinhalese political parties which were otherwise hostile to its objectives. And on each of these occasions the Party has exploited its bargaining position to negotiate for what it has termed its 'minimum demands'<sup>78</sup>

On the debit side there is a list of failures and disappointments. The strategy of the FP in opposition proved

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78. Wilson, The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics in Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies (Vol. IV, No. 2 July 1966), p. 119.

too costly to the Tamils. They suffered loss of life in race riots following the campaign of the FP in 1956 and in 1958. The causes for these communal clashes cannot be solely attributed to the FP's campaigns. But certainly they created an atmosphere of tension in the country leading to inter-ethnic clashes between the two communities as for example the "anti-sri" campaign. The FP did not take much interest in educating Sinhalese people about their claims as well as grievances and the moral value of its campaigns. On the other hand it created misunderstanding in the minds of Sinhalese people which aggravated the already strained relationship between the two communities.

It is clear from the above analysis that the FP could not achieve complete success in its objectives by following the two strategies that it leaned on. The question therefore arises as to why the FP failed to achieve a complete success. To answer this we have to examine the nature of the FP's non-violent campaigns in opposition.

Of the four campaigns of the FP, only one can be considered as based strictly on Gandhian principles, namely the satyagraha campaign of 1961. Although the FP claims that the sit-down protest demonstration of 1956 was satyagraha, it cannot be considered so, because it failed to fulfill the basic requirements of a satyagraha. Firstly, the FP did not give adequate time to the government to

come to an honourable settlement. Without much preparation needed for a satyagraha, the party took a decision only two weeks before the demonstration. Secondly, the objective of the demonstration was to protest the introduction of the "Official Language Bill". The circumstances did not seem to warrant such a course of action. Finally, the demonstration was originally planned for a full day but called off at noon.

The "anti-sri" campaign of 1958 as a form of non-violent resistance had many weaknesses. The cause as such did not warrant the organization of such a campaign. Though the "Sinhala sri" and "Tamil sri" symbolized the cultures of the two communities, it had only emotional value. Non-violent resistance should in principle not hurt opponents physically as well as mentally. In the case of the "anti-sri" campaign, the "Sinhala sri" letters were obliterated and "Tamil sri" letters were inserted thereby rousing feelings of animosity among the Sinhalese.

The FP's "Tamil only" campaign does not merit an examination, because it was not an organized campaign of resistance. It was only an appeal to the Tamil public by the FP leaders.

As it is, the only campaign based strictly on Gandhian principles was the FP's satyagraha campaign of 1961. The nature of this campaign was mass based non-violent direct action. The Tamil-speaking community had a just cause



and every member of the Tamil community felt that the implementation of "Sinhalese only" legislation in the Northern and Eastern Provinces was an injustice, especially in a context where the majority of the people did not know any language other than Tamil. The FP had fulfilled every requirement that was necessary for a satyagraha campaign. It was ready to negotiate with the government for a settlement and in fact it did negotiate. Only when negotiations failed to bring a settlement did the FP launch its campaign. The party made adequate efforts to educate the Tamil people. It conducted training classes for its volunteers. The campaign nevertheless failed to bring the necessary change or the desired goal of the party. Why? Does Gandhian techniques of satyagraha bring the necessary change only under certain circumstances or can it be applied universally without taking the circumstances into consideration? To answer this we have to examine the circumstances in Sri Lanka under which the FP conducted its campaigns.

One argument<sup>79</sup> put forward for the failure of the FP's campaign is that the FP led its campaigns on behalf of the Tamil speaking people against the Government of Sri Lanka. The Tamil speaking people it is argued are part of the sovereign polity and are not part of a

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79. This point of view was expressed by the TC General Secretary in the interview with him to the author in 1976.

subordinate state nor are they a colony. Gandhi led his campaigns against an alien ruler with considerable support from the Indian people. In Sri Lanka on the other hand, it is insisted that there was no sympathy from the majority of the Sinhalese people for the FP's campaigns. But this line of argument fails to note that Gandhi successfully led a non-violent campaign under similar circumstances, on behalf of Indians in South Africa.<sup>80</sup> Under the guidance of Gandhi, the untouchables of Vykomb (India) resorted to satyagraha in 1925 against the majority high caste Hindus so as to compel the latter to remove the prohibition placed upon the use by untouchables of roadways passing the temple. The untouchables succeeded in their objective.<sup>81</sup> This satyagraha in India supports the view that a minority group in particular society can rightly use satyagraha against a majority, if it has a "just cause".

Two other factors need to be taken into consideration in our assessment. Firstly, it should be noted that even though the FP was protesting against an unjust piece of legislation, that legislation was nevertheless considered by sections of the Sinhalese people as just and necessary. For instance, the United Bhikku Front (EBP), the Tri Sinhala Peramuna (Three Sinhalese Front) the Bhasha Peramuna

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80. Mohandas K. Gandhi: "The Origins of Satyagraha Doctrine" in The Quiet Battle ed. by Mulford Q. Sibley (New York: Double day & Company Inc., 1963), pp. 30-45.

81. See J.V. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, pp. 46-64.

(Language Front) and the Sinhalese National Liberation Front (JVP) welcomed the Sinhalese only Bill. The UNP also supported this Bill. In short the Sinhalese only policy had popular support among sections of the Sinhalese people from 1956.

The FP's anti-sri campaign in 1958 did not in our assessment of Gandhian strategy warrant the use of non-violent technique of resistance. Vittachi has noted that they needed an issue desperately in order to stay in the spot light ... The issue was too patently insubstantial to rouse any real popular fervour in the north ...<sup>82</sup>

The situation was different in 1961 when the FP launched its satyagraha. The implementation of Sinhalese only in the Tamil areas was a violation of human rights. The overwhelming majority of people in these areas did not know any language other than their mother tongue, Tamil. However, the JVP and the Buddha Jatika Balavegaya (BJB: National Front for the Protection of Buddhism) pressed the government to enforce the use of Sinhalese as the language of administration in the Tamil areas.

The second and the most important reason for the failure of the FP's campaigns was the ever present threat

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82. Tarzie Vittachi, Emergency'58: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1958), p. 89.

of counter movement from the majority group. Just before the FP conducted its demonstration at Galle Face Green in June 1956, F.R. Jeyasuriya, a prominent Sinhalese and also a member of the JVP, went on "fast to death" on the steps of the House of Representatives. He did not want the government to include any provisions for the use of the Tamil language in the proposed "Official Language Bill". The Prime Minister visited him and appealed to him to give up his fast. He invited him to address the government parliamentary group. Further on the day the FP had its demonstration, there was a counter-movement staged by the Sinhalese which forced the FP to withdraw its satyagraha.

Immediately after the FP's "anti-sri" campaign a tar-brush campaign was started in the Sinhalese areas to obliterate Tamil letters in public buildings. Buddhist monks spearheaded a counter movement in the Sinhalese areas to boycott Tamil shops and boutiques.

In opposition to the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact, the UNP organized a pilgrimage to the Daladha Maligawa (the temple of the sacred tooth relic of the Buddha) to denounce the pact. This was led by J.R. Jeyawardana the present President of Sri Lanka. The then leader of the UNP, Dudley Senanayake, organized rallies in the Sinhalese areas to campaign against the pact. On April 9th, 1958 about 200 Buddhist monks and 300 others led by Rev. Devamottava Amaravana Thero went in procession and staged a sit down strike in front of the Prime Minister's residence

demanding the abrogation of the "B.C. Pact". The Prime Minister acceded to their demand. He gave these monks a written pledge assuring them that the pact was no more.

During the 1961 satyagraha campaign of the FP, the JVP and BJB vehemently opposed any attempt by the government to make concessions to the FP. By 1960, the language policies of the two major parties (the UNP and the SLFP) had become almost institutionalized. Both UNP and SLFP leaders feared that any relaxation in the language legislation would result in their parties losing support in the Sinhalese areas. The main opposition to the FP's satyagraha in 1961 came from the SLFP's parliamentary ranks.

From the above analysis, it is evident that there had been a continuous threat of counter-movement not necessarily in the form of non-violence but of actual violence. Consequently, the FP's campaigns had not produced the necessary results. Thus, we can generalize the conditions necessary for the success of a non-violent resistance in a multi-ethnic society in the following terms:

- (i) Satyagrahis who participate in non-violent resistance should clearly understand and become convinced of the Gandhian principles of non-violent resistance. Satyagraha must not be used only as a temporary method of

resistance. A constructive programme of building a new order should accompany the campaign.

(ii) The opponents of satyagraha must also have belief in the moral value of non-violent principles. Sponsors of satyagraha should educate their opponents about their just "cause".

(iii) There should be no threat of counter movement in any form (either non-violent or violent) to satyagraha from any section of the people in a particular country in which the campaign is launched, especially at the time of the campaign.

Absence of these three conditions in Sri Lanka during the FP's campaigns can be considered as the causes for the failure of the FP to achieve its objectives fully in opposition.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE STRATEGY OF THE FEDERAL PARTY IN GOVERNMENT (1965-68) AND AS AN INDEPENDENT GROUP IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES (1968-70)

#### THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE FP'S STRATEGY

The political situation in Sri Lanka underwent a change with the general election of March 1965. "New political trends and significant shifts in governmental policy"<sup>1</sup> followed this election. The governing coalition composed of the SLFP and the LSSP was defeated in this election and a new government was formed by the UNP leader Dudley Senanayake. M.R. Singer noted this change in the context of Sinhalese-Tamil relationships in the following terms:

If the election of 1956 can be said to have signalled the "official" beginning of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in Ceylon, the election of 1965 can be said to have marked the "official" termination of those hostilities.<sup>2</sup>

To a certain extent the second part of the above statement is a reflection of the new government's point of view of

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1. R.N. Kearney, "New Directions in the Politics of Ceylon" in Asian Survey (Vol.VII, No. 2, February 1967), p. 111.

2. Marshall R. Singer, "National Government in Ceylon: A year of Reconciliation" in Asian Survey (Vol. VI, No. 2, February 1966), p. 90.

the inter-ethnic relations of the country. For the first time since 1956, it had become possible for a Sri Lankan Prime Minister to include Tamils in his government. Moreover a Ceylon Tamil, the FP's representative was included in the cabinet. In fact there was a marked change in the campaign that preceded this election. When compared to the preceding three election campaigns, communal questions were submerged or played a small role at this election. The main issues in this campaign were the "socialist aims" of the SLFP-LSSP coalition parties and the alleged "dictatorial actions and designs" of the coalition parties by the UNP. Another important issue in this election was the question of the "monopoly press". The SLFP and its allies campaigned for the nationalization of the press. They maintained that the press owned by privileged families, backed by business interests was unsympathetic to the national aspirations of the Buddhist and Sinhalese people and they insisted that this monopoly should be broken. The UNP on the other hand warned that this would be the first step towards the setting up of a "Marxist dictatorship".<sup>3</sup> The SLFP and its partners said that "they were the poor man's party ranged against "big business" and 'Anglo American' capital".<sup>4</sup> The UNP on its side warned

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3. Wilson, Electoral Politics in an Emergent State: The Ceylon General Election of May 1970 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 29.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 29.



against increasing state intervention in the economic life of the people. It maintained that the "island faced its last opportunity to preserve democracy and the rule of law."<sup>5</sup>

The FP in its election campaign emphasized the need for a single party to be returned from the Tamil-speaking areas so that a party like itself be in a position to bargain for the "rights" of the Tamil-speaking people with the two major parties in the event any of them not being returned with a decisive majority. For instance in the party's 1965 Election Manifesto it was stated:

There is no doubt that the next general election is going to be a very important event in the history of Ceylon. The left and the right wing allies are engaged in an unprecedented contest for power in the South.... As a result we can expect that an opportunity would arise after this election to change the fate of the Tamil-speaking people, at least to a certain extent. To make use of such an opportunity to regain our lost rights it is necessary that representatives of the Tamil-speaking people should be elected from a single organized party.<sup>6</sup>

Party propagandists pointed out their record of struggles against the previous two governments and pledged that they would continue to struggle for the party's objectives.

The result of 1965 general election was inconclusive. None of the predominantly Sinhalese parties gained an

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5. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 128.

6. Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Therthal Vingnapanam, March 1965 (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1965), p. 1.

TABLE VI

## Party Positions at General Election, 1965

| Parties                     | Candidates | Seats<br>won | %<br>seats | Votes<br>polled | %<br>votes | Votes per<br>candidate |
|-----------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|------------|------------------------|
| UNP                         | 116        | 66           | 43.7       | 1,579,181       | 38.93      | 13,614                 |
| SLFP                        | 100        | 41           | 27.2       | 1,226,833       | 30.24      | 12,268                 |
| LSSP                        | 24         | 10           | 6.6        | 302,095         | 7.45       | 12,587                 |
| CP                          | 9          | 4            | 2.6        | 109,744         | 2.71       | 12,194                 |
| MEP (Philip<br>Gunawardane) | 60         | 1            | 0.7        | 110,388         | 2.73       | 1,840                  |
| SLFSP                       | 32         | 5            | 3.3        | 129,986         | 3.20       | 4,062                  |
| TC                          | 15         | 3            | 2.0        | 98,726          | 2.43       | 6,582                  |
| FP                          | 20         | 14           | 9.3        | 217,986         | 5.37       | 10,899                 |
| JVP                         | 10         | 1            | 0.7        | 18,791          | 0.46       | 1,879                  |
| Independents                | 96         | 6            | 4.0        | 237,805         | 5.86       | 2,477                  |
| Others                      | 10         | 0            | 0.0        | 24,932          | 0.61       | 2,493                  |
| Total                       | 492        | 151          |            | 4,056,467       |            |                        |
| Total no. of<br>Votes       |            |              |            | 4,710,887       |            |                        |
| Percentage<br>polled        |            |              |            | 82              |            |                        |

SOURCE: A.J. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 172

overall majority to form a government. The UNP emerged as the largest single group with sixty six seats (See Table VI, p. 142). The SLFP and its allies, the LSSP and the CP secured fifty five seats (SLFP-41, LSSP-10 and CP-04). This made the FP's support crucial for the formation of a government. The coalition leaders and Dudley Senanayake approached the FP leader for assistance. The FP decided to back Dudley Senanayake in the formation of a government. On the FP's side the feeling that the SLFP had gone back on its understandings especially that of 1960 prompted it to opt for alliance with the UNP.

As a part of the FP's strategy, its leader Chelvanayakam negotiated with Dudley Senanayake for its "minimum demands" in exchange for his party's support. As a result, a pact was drawn up between the FP leader and Dudley Senanayake. This pact was not made public for political reasons, particularly "to blunt opposition criticism". Wilson has recorded the terms of this pact on the basis of information from the FP leaders:

Senanayake agreed to (a) a scheme of district councils under the direct supervision of the Central Government, (b) preference being given to the people of the area in any colonization scheme in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, (c) Tamil being made a parallel language of administration with Sinhalese in the two provinces mentioned, (d) amending the Language of the Courts Act by providing for the use of the Tamil language in judicial administration in these two provinces in addition to Sinhalese, and (e) relief for Tamil public servants who

had failed to gain<sup>7</sup> proficiency in the official language.

Dudley Senanayake also came to an understanding with the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). The CWC is the largest trade union representing Indian workers in the plantation areas. This organization had supported the UNP in these areas. The points of this agreement were:

- (i) no hardships would be created for Indians who were to be repatriated under the Indo-Ceylon Agreement of October 1964.
- (ii) the element of compulsion in repatriating Indians would not be enforced.
- (iii) Indians obtaining Ceylonese Citizenship would be included in the general electorate.<sup>8</sup>

If Senanayake had not agreed to these concessions to the CWC, the FP would not have backed Senanayake, because that party has always been concerned with the citizenship problem of people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka.

In addition to the FP and the CWC, Senanayake was able to obtain the support of four other political groups. They were the Tamil Congress (TC), the Sri Lanka Freedom Socialist Party (SLFSP), the JVP and the MEP. Senanayake called his administration the "National Government" because of the inclusion of representatives from Ceylon Tamil, Indian Tamil and certain Sinhalese nationalist groups. As Wilson

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7. Wilson, Electoral Politics in an Emergent State, p. 31.

8. Ibid., p. 31.

has commented, Senanayake "was able to weld together these diverse and sometimes warring interests into a coalition of 'democratic forces'."<sup>9</sup>

Although portfolios in the new Cabinet were offered by the Prime Minister to the FP, none of its elected members were willing to accept office in the "National Government". It is a policy of the FP not to accept office in any government until it achieves its objectives. However, the FP nominated one of its leading party members, M. Tiruchelvam as its representative in the Cabinet. Consequently, Tiruchelvam was appointed to the Senate by the Government and named Minister of Local Government. This portfolio was of interest to the FP because, it expected that the drafting of the "district councils" bill would be entrusted to him. Two members of the CWC, including its leader S. Thondaman, were nominated as Appointed Members<sup>10</sup> of the House of Representatives. Speaking at the debate on the Address on 25th April 1965, Amirthalingam, the present leader of the party said:

Let not hon. members opposite or anyone else in the country think that, because we have decided to support this Government, we have in anyway surrendered or given up the principles and policies for which our party stands.<sup>11</sup>

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9. Ibid., p. 31.

10. Under Section 11(2) of the Soulbury Constitution the Governor General was empowered after a General Election to appoint on the advise of the Prime Minister, not more than six members to the House of Representatives.

11. A Amirthalingam, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) House of Representatives, Official Report (Vol. 60, No. 5, Colombo: Government Press, 1965), Column 685.

Basically the "National Government" was a UNP-FP coalition. If the FP had withdrawn its support, the Senanayake administration could not have lasted for long. The FP's strategy in the "National Government" centered around this critical support. The FP therefore sought to exploit the situation to gain its "minimum demands".

#### THE TAMIL LANGUAGE (SPECIAL PROVISIONS) REGULATIONS - 1966

The FP's participation in the "National Government" brought its first dividend in January, 1966. The government enacted regulations in 1966 for the implementation of the Tamil language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958. The original act enacted by the Bandaranaike government in 1958 not had the necessary regulations framed under it to give it effect.

The regulations specified that the Tamil language should be used in "the Northern and Eastern Provinces for the transaction of all government and public business and the maintenance of public records"<sup>12</sup> and for correspondence between government officials and private individuals who have been educated in the Tamil language. Furthermore, it provided for the use of the Tamil language in communications between local authorities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and the Central Government. Further, all orders, proclamations, rules, regulations and

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12. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, Appendix IV, p. 150.

all other official publications issued or used by public bodies were required to be translated and published in the Tamil language. These regulations asserted that the use of the Tamil language for the above purposes was to be "without prejudice to the operation of the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956, which declared the Sinhalese language to be the one official language of Ceylon."<sup>13</sup>

These regulations fulfilled one of the "minimum demands" of the FP. Speaking at the debate on this Bill Chelvanayakam said:

...the Sinhala only Act deprived the Tamil speaking people of their self respect in this country. By passing these Regulations and thereby implementing the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, this lost self-respect is restored in some measure.<sup>14</sup>

However, the FP leaders indicated that they accepted this only as a temporary solution and insisted that they had not abandoned their ultimate objective of parity of status for the Tamil language with the Sinhalese language.

The coalition parties (the SLFP, the LSSP and the CP) which formed the opposition made a joint statement charging that the regulations "undermine the Official Language Act and will prevent Sinhala from becoming in fact the official language throughout Ceylon."<sup>15</sup> They organized a political

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13. Ibid., p. 150.

14. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) House of Representatives, Official Report (Vol. 64, Colombo: Government Press, 1966) Column 132.

15. Kearney, Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon, p. 133.

strike and a demonstration on the day the Bill was introduced in the House. Police action against the demonstrators resulted in the death of a Buddhist monk. As a result of the disorders in Colombo the Government declared a state of national emergency. Nevertheless, the regulations were approved by Parliament on 11th January, 1966.

#### CONCESSIONS TO THE TAMIL PUBLIC SERVANTS

On the basis of the pact between the FP and the Prime Minister, a resolution was passed in the Cabinet in 1965 which provided some relief to the Tamil public servants who had failed to gain proficiency in the official language, the Sinhalese. The Cabinet decision on this subject was stipulated in two treasury circulars (Nos. 700 and 701).

The circular No. 700 stated that the notices of compulsory retirement of public servants who had failed to gain proficiency in the official language, served before the election should be withdrawn. Circular No. 701 declared that those who joined the public service in 1956 and after on the basis of examinations conducted in Tamil would be required to pass the proficiency test in Sinhalese language within three years of appointment. The requirements of the proficiency test in Sinhalese was lowered from Senior School Certificate level to Junior School Certificate. It also provided for new entrant



Tamil public servants to take up their promotion test in the Tamil language.<sup>16</sup>

These concessions made to the Tamil public servants, saved thousands of them from the threat of dismissal for their failure to gain proficiency in the official language. This was another achievement of the FP's strategy in Government.

#### THE INDO-CEYLON AGREEMENT (IMPLEMENTATION) ACT OF 1968

The "National Government" in its second year of office presented another bill in the House dealing with the question of people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka, namely the Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Implementation) Bill. The original Indo-Ceylon Agreement was concluded between India and Ceylon in October 1964. This agreement provided for the repatriation to India of 525,000 persons of Indian origin in Sri Lanka, together with their natural increase, and for the absorption of 300,000 as Ceylon citizens over a period of fifteen years. It was agreed that the political status of the remaining 150,000 persons of Indian origin would be negotiated later.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), House of Representatives Official Report (Vol. 87, Ceylon: Government Press, September 1969), Columns 878-879. See also Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Election Manifesto 1970 (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1970), pp. 3-4.

17. Urmila Phadnis, "The Indo-Ceylon Pact and the 'Stateless Indians in Ceylon' in Asian Survey (Vol. VII, No. 4, April 1967), p. 228.

In a statement on November 10, 1964, the then Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike stated that she had intention of introducing "a separate electoral register for people of Indian origin registered as Ceylonese citizens as well as compulsory repatriation for Indian citizens."<sup>18</sup> This interpretation given by her to the agreement evoked opposition from both CWC and the FP.

Dudley Senanayake, in keeping with his agreement with the CWC, removed the element of compulsion and dropped the earlier intention of placing Indians registered as citizens of Sri Lanka in a separate electoral roll, in a Bill he presented for the implementation of the Indo-Ceylon Agreement. The opposition coalition parties vigorously opposed this Bill. Their opposition was focused on the government's intention of removing the element of compulsion in the repatriation of Indians and of giving citizenship immediately to all Indian Tamils who became citizens. The earlier intention was to delay the grant of citizenship until such time as those were repatriated equalled the number qualifying to Ceylon citizenship.<sup>19</sup> One of the principles of the original agreement was to maintain a seven to four ratio tying the grant of Ceylon citizenship to Indians qualified for it to the physical repatriation of Indians opting for Indian nationality.

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18. Ibid., p. 229.

19. Kearney, "Ceylon: Political Stresses and Cohesion" in Asian Survey (Vol. VIII, No. 2, February 1968) p. 105.

The opposition maintained that the Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964 was not being properly implemented and alleged that the interests of the Kandyan Sinhalese were overlooked in implementing the agreement.

After bitter criticism and attack by the opposition, the Bill was eventually approved by Parliament in early 1968. Enactment of this legislation was another success for the FP's strategy in Government. It had been a consistent demand of the FP that the citizenship laws of the country should be amended so as to enable qualified Indians to obtain Ceylon citizenship.

#### PROPOSALS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DISTRICT COUNCILS

In November 1967, the general council of the FP met to review the benefits derived from the participation of the party in the "National Government". A section of the general council members who were dissatisfied with the benefits gained by the party, brought a resolution demanding the party to quit the government. This resolution was however defeated. But the meeting resolved to require the Prime Minister to fulfill the promises given to the party by the end of January 1968.<sup>20</sup>

Dudley Senanayake, in keeping with his promises to the FP, presented a White Paper comprising the proposals for the establishment of District Councils in June 1968.

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20. Information based on interviews with FP leaders.

In fact the cardinal purpose of the FP's joining the government was on the promise of the establishment of District Councils. Because the FP "hoped that these councils would be a step in the direction of their objective of obtaining regional autonomy for the Ceylon Tamil areas."<sup>21</sup>

The clause 74 of the White Paper stated that:

Every District Council shall function under the general direction and control of the Government. The appropriate Minister may, from time to time issue general or special directions to the Commissioner to carry out such direction.<sup>22</sup>

The reference to central government control in the above clause was intended on the part of government to clear the doubts of the opposition that the councils would not be wholly autonomous bodies.

However, the opposition coalition parties made it known in no uncertain terms that they were opposed to the proposed District Councils. Their main opposition was that the District Councils would disrupt national unity and divide the country. They argued that it would threaten the welfare of the Sinhalese and Muslims living in the Tamil-speaking areas. They maintained that these councils would lead to the formation of a Tamil state in the North. Even the TC, the second Ceylon Tamil group backing the

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21. Wilson, Electoral Politics in an Engent State, p. 36.

22. Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), House of Representatives Official Report (Vol. 78 - Ceylon: Government Press, 1968), Column 3100.

government opposed this proposals. Speaking at the debate on the White Paper, T.C. leader Ponnambalam said that: "the principles of this Bill, as we see in the White Paper, are bad for Ceylon and worse for the Tamils."<sup>23</sup>

The opposition was successful in rousing public opinion against the Bill. They boycotted the debate on the White Paper and organized a rally in Colombo and burnt the proposals at the meeting. Moreover some fifteen members within the UNP parliamentary group, threatened the Prime Minister that they would vote against the proposals, if he presented the Bill. Faced with growing popular opposition, Dudley Senanayake abandoned the proposed Bill.

Despite the failure of Dudley Senanayake to keep with his promise, the FP continued to support him, because they were convinced of the Prime Minister's sincerity. They realized that it had not been possible for him to have the Bill to establish district councils enacted for causes beyond his control. Tiruchelvam later in a statement in the Senate said:

The Hon. Prime Minister tried his best to honour his promises ... I want to pay tribute to him, he tried his best to introduce the District Council Bill as was agreed upon between him and the members of the Federal Party.<sup>24</sup>

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23. Ibid., Col. 3010

24. M. Tiruchelvam, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) Senate Official Report (Ceylon: Government Press, Vol. 26, 1968), Col. 786.

THE KONESWARAM HINDU TEMPLE ISSUE AND THE FEDERAL PARTY'S  
WITHDRAWAL FROM THE "NATIONAL GOVERNMENT"

Historically, the Koneswaram Hindu temple at Trincomalee in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka has been a place of religious worship for the Hindus. It is also a place of pilgrimage for people and particularly a "place venerated by the Saivaites (a sect in Hindu religion) of Ceylon."<sup>25</sup> From 1954 onwards, various requests have been made by Hindu religious bodies to the government for the creation of sacred city round this temple.

When the Prime Minister visited Trincomalee in May 1967, a memorandum was presented by the people of Trincomalee requesting him to declare the Koneswaram temple area as a sacred area for Hindus. The Prime Minister on his return to Colombo referred this request to the Ministry of Local Government.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, the Minister of Local Government appointed a committee to report on the areas to be included in the sacred city. Meanwhile, representations were made by the Chief Sanga Nayake (Buddhist High Priest) of Tammankaduwa, Eastern Province objecting to the decision of the Minister of Local Government. The High Priest stated that an ancient place of Buddhist worship was situated in that area which would "get into the hands of those who are

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25. Ibid., Column 790.

26. Ibid., Columns 791-795.

neither Sinhalese nor Buddhist."<sup>27</sup> The Prime Minister in a reply to the High Priest wrote that he had asked "the Minister of Local Government to suspend the committee appointed in this connection."<sup>28</sup> Thereafter, the Prime Minister requested the Minister of Local Government not to take any action on this matter. When Tiruchelvam (Minister of Local Government) again discussed the matter with the Prime Minister on 13th November 1968, the Prime Minister stated that it was his duty as Minister of Local Government to have consulted with him before he appointed a committee.

This misunderstanding between the Minister of Local Government and the Prime Minister led to the resignation of Tiruchelvam from his portfolio and to the withdrawal of the FP from the "National Government". In a statement to the Senate on 16th November, referring to the letter written to the High Priest of Thambankaduwa, Tiruchelvam said that:

"The effect of this letter is a public announcement to the Hindus of Ceylon that upon the request of a Buddhist priest, however well-intentioned or ill-intentioned the request - the unanimous wish of all Hindu religious bodies, of the Tamil local bodies, of various people of this country for the declaration of this area ... as a sacred area should be

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27. Ibid., Column 799.

28. Ibid., Column 801.

set at nought. This is the atmosphere in which I found it difficult to continue to be a member of this Government.<sup>29</sup>

The FP enchanted with the Government on the District Council issue, chose this as an issue to sever its connection with the "National Government".

THE FEDERAL PARTY AS AN INDEPENDENT GROUP IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES (1968-70)

The Strategy of the FP (November 1968-April 1969)

The FP, despite its disappointments with the government over the District Councils Bill, and the Koneswaram Hindu temple question, announced its intention to function as an independent group in the House of Representatives and continued to support the Government "in all issues which do not adversely affect the Tamil speaking people."<sup>30</sup>

Although the "National Government" had a slender majority even after the FP's departure from its ranks, it was not a working majority. The FP continued to support the Government to gain some other "rights" which Senanayake had agreed upon. The FP's strategy during this period had been to allow the Prime Minister time to fulfill the party's requests. The FP's 1970 Election

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29. Ibid., Column 802,

30. Ralpa E. Fretty, "Ceylon: Election-Oriented Politics" in Asian Survey (Vol. IX, No. 2, February 1968), p. 102.



Manifesto had outlined the reasons for its continued support of the "National Government" to obtain the following:

- (i) establishment of a full-fledged university at Trincomalee (Eastern Province),
- (ii) full implementation of the Tamil language (Special Provisions) Regulations of 1966,
- and (iii) economic development of the Northern and Eastern Provinces:
  - (a) development of Kankesanthurai harbor
  - (b) an industrial plant in Jaffna
  - (c) improvement of the Eastern Province public transport facilities.<sup>31</sup>

During this period FP MPs had appealed to the Ministers in charge of the above subjects on several occasions to take action regarding their requests. But they failed to get any responses from the Ministers. Speaking at the debate on the Address of the Governor General on 18th July 1969, Amirthalingam said:

... after the departure of my party from the ranks of Government their actions and their attitudes have proved that they no longer intend carrying out their policies to mate out justice and fairplay to all, irrespective of race, community or religion.<sup>32</sup>

#### The Strategy of the FP (April 1969-March 1970)

In April 1969, the FP had its Annual Convention at

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31. Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Theerthal Vingapanam 1970 (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1970), p. 5.

32. A. Amirthalingam, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) Vol. 85, 1969) column 62.

Uduvil, Jaffna. The convention resolved that the party should function as an independent group in Opposition, because the government had failed to concede the party's demands. It was decided that the party should not support the government any longer. The FP's strategy during this period had been parliamentary opposition to the Government.

The FP's 1970 Election Manifesto outlined the reasons for their decision:

The government had failed to establish a full-fledged university, and improve the public transport facilities in the Eastern Province. Neither had it started an industrial plant or developed the Kankesanthurai harbour in the Northern Province. Further it failed to implement fully, the Tamil language (Special Provisions) Regulations of 1966. It issued orders for the dismissal of Tamil public servants for their failure to gain proficiency in Sinhalese language.<sup>33</sup>

When speaking at the House of Representatives on 1st September 1969, V. Tharmalingam MP (FP) said that only when we realized that the government was no longer able to fulfill the promises given to our party that we crossed over to opposition.<sup>34</sup>

The FP's criticisms of the government from the opposition benches paid some dividends. The Prime Minister visited the Jaffna peninsula in mid-November 1969 to lay the foundation for a 25 million rupee harbour in

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33. Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Theerthal Vingnapanam 1970, pp. 6-7.

34. V. Tharmalingam, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) (Vol. 87, 1969) column 876.

Kankesanthurai. The Minister of Education announced that the Government would establish a full-fledged university soon in the North or East. Further he declared that the "new entrant Tamil public servants who had failed to gain proficiency in the official language (Sinhalese) by the deadline would be allowed a further year within which to qualify."<sup>35</sup>

However, before the government could put the above promises into practice, Parliament was dissolved in March 1970 and a general election was fixed for May 1970.

AN EVALUATION OF THE FEDERAL PARTY'S STRATEGY IN GOVERNMENT (1965-68) AND AS AN INDEPENDENT GROUP IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The FP's strategy as a constituent partner in the "National Government" was to render it conditional support on the basis of the pact it had entered into with Dudley Senanayake, before the formation of the government. Continued support of the FP, the second largest party backing the government, was crucial to the government's working majority. In comparison with the FP's strategy in opposition vis-a-vis extra-parliamentary agitations based on Gandhian methods of non-violence, the party in government changed its strategy to one of utilising Parliament, as for example through debates, negotiations with ministers

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35. Wilson, "Mr. Senanayake's Remarkable Record: Stability and Rapid Economic Growth" in Round Table (Vol. 60 - Nos. 237-240, 1970), p. 208.

as problems relating to the Tamil-speaking areas etc. The Prime Minister was invited by the party as a guest to its 10th national convention held at Kalmunai (Eastern Province) in 1966. The Prime Minister's participation in this convention was quite without precedent for a Sinhalese politician. It symbolized the changed strategy of the party during this period. Naganathan, the party president, when addressing the convention stated "after our long sojourn in the political wilderness and parliamentary opposition, we helped to form the present National Government."<sup>36</sup>

The first three years of the FP's three and a half years participation in the "National Government" proved to be limited success. During this period the party succeeded in gaining three of its minimum demands. However, it failed to gain its most important one, namely, the establishment of District Councils which were to inaugurate centrally supervised local autonomy.

The enactment of regulations for the implementation of the Tamil language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958 by the "National Government" in January 1966 was the party's principal gain. The party president in 1969, claimed that these regulations legally recognized the fact of parity of status for Tamil language with Sinhalese language in the

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36. Dr. E.M.V. Naganathan, Presidential Address, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi 10th National Convention, Kalmunai (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1966), p. 3.

Northern and Eastern Provinces.<sup>37</sup> From the FP's point of view, these regulations were a step in the right direction towards the achievement of its basic objectives of obtaining parity of status for the Tamil language with Sinhalese language.

The National Government's decision to withdraw notices served by the previous government compulsory retiring public servants who failed to gain proficiency in Sinhalese together with the announcement of a three year period of grace to be allowed to new entrant Tamil public servants to gain proficiency in Sinhalese was yet another success for the party's strategy in Government. These concessions staved off the calamity of thousands of Tamils from being forced to retire from the public service.

The Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Implementation) Act enacted by the Government in early 1968 was still another gain for the party. This act removed the element of compulsion in the repatriation of Indians in Sri Lanka who opted for Indian citizenship. It further provided for the inclusion in the general electorate of those Indians obtaining Sri Lanka citizenship. Had the Indians registering for Sri Lanka citizenship been placed in a separate electoral roll as had been intended by the previous

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37. S.M. Rasamanickam, Thalamai Perurai, Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi, 11th Annual Convention, Uduvil (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1969), p. 11.

government, they could not hope to be as effective electorally. The amending act accorded equal treatment to Indians becoming citizens of Sri Lanka.

One of the basic objectives of the FP has been the demand for the repeal of the citizenship law which discriminated against Indian plantation workers and other settlers in Sri Lanka. To a very limited extent this objective was attained under the original Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964 and the subsequent implementation act of 1968. According to the original agreement, Sri Lanka accepted 300,000 persons of Indian origin as citizens, while the implementation act provided that such citizens would receive the same treatment as the natural citizens of the country. The FP's 1970 Election Manifesto emphasized that the inclusion of Indians registered as Sri Lankan citizens in the general electorate would help towards the Tamils of Sri Lanka regaining a portion of their lost political strength in future.<sup>38</sup>

The FP faced its first disappointment in Government, when the Prime Minister abandoned the proposed Bill for the establishment of District Councils in mid 1968. The party's hope that these District Councils would be a step towards its objectives of obtaining regional autonomy for the Tamil speaking areas was shattered by the widespread

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38. Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Therthal Vingnapanam 1970 (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1970), p. 13.

opposition to this Bill.

Shortly after the District Councils controversy, the FP faced further frustration in Government. The Prime Minister declined to concede the party's request that the precincts around the Koneswaram Hindu temple at Trincomalee be declared a sacred area. The decision of the FP Minister of Local Government to appoint a committee to look into this question was overruled by the Prime Minister. Consequently, the FP's representative in the Government, M. Tiruchelvam, resigned his portfolio and the FP withdrew from the "National Government". Although, the Koneswaram temple matter was comparatively an "unimportant issue", the FP chose this issue to quit, because of its disenchantment over the failure of the district councils bill.

The FP's policy from November 1968 to April 1969 was to provide continued support to the "National Government", not as constituent partner, but as an independent group. The strategy of the party was to allow the Prime Minister time to concede some of its requests such as a full-fledged university in the Tamil language medium located in the Eastern Province and economic assistance to the Northern and Eastern Provinces. However, the party failed to obtain either of these because the government did not take any action on them. Amirthalingam, when speaking at the debate on Address of the Governor

General on 18th July 1969 said:

I think even those members of the Tamil community who are yet on that side feel that the Hon. Prime Minister apart from expressing concern and sympathy, has not been able to alienate the difficulties of the Tamil people.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the FP's strategy during November 1968 - April 1969 bore no results.

The party's annual convention in April 1969, resolved that it should not support the "National Government" any longer. Accordingly, the party changed its strategy from one of supporting the government to one of opposition. From April 1969 to March 1970 it functioned as an independent group in Opposition. In contrast to its earlier strategy of extraparliamentary agitation, the FP chose to confine its activities to opposition in Parliament. Party leaders criticized the government for its failure to live up to its promises. For instance Amirthalingam argued that:

... this Government is no longer entitled to call itself 'a National Government' because the party which represents the largest section of the Tamil people in this country has ceased to have any confidence in this Government and has been made to quit its ranks. I say that the discriminatory actions of this Government made us to quit its ranks.<sup>40</sup>

The party however did not meet with total failure during

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39. A. Amirthalingam, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) (Vol. 85, 1969), Column 66.

40. Ibid., Column 63.



this oppositional phase. The Prime Minister visited Jaffna to lay the foundation for the Kankesanthurai harbour project. Further the Minister of Education announced the intention of the Government to establish a university either in the North or in the East and also informed that a further year of period be allowed to the new entrant Tamil public servants to gain proficiency in the official language.

The question why the party failed to achieve the rest of its demands needs to be answered. The main reason for its failure to obtain District Councils might be attributed to the well organized opposition of the SLFP and its marxist allies, the LSSP and the CP. After the formation of the "National Government" in 1965, the Opposition parties launched a campaign alleging that the Prime Minister, Dudley Senanayake, had betrayed the Sinhalese people by entering into a "secret pact" with the FP. They opposed without success, the regulations framed under the Tamil language (Special Provisions) Act in 1966 as well as the Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Implementation) Act enacted in 1968. But they met with considerable success in the opposition they organized against the proposed District Councils Bill. They boycotted the debate on the White Paper on District Councils and held mass rally in Colombo to denounce it.

The Prime Minister "had done all he could to honour his pledge"<sup>41</sup> to the FP but the opposition parties were

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41. Wilson, Electoral Politics in an Emergent State, p. 37.

able to stir up so much controversy on this Bill. The TC, the second Ceylon Tamil grouping backing the Government also opposed this Bill. The FP, later alleged that the TC's stand on this Bill helped to evoke opposition among the members of the Government Parliamentary group. Some members of the UNP Parliamentary group indicated to the Prime Minister that they would vote against the Bill leaving the Prime Minister with no option but to abandon the proposed Bill.

The FP's request for the precincts around the Koneswaram temple at Trincomalee to be declared a sacred area failed because of objections from the Buddhist High Priest of the Thambankaduwa in the Eastern Province. Furthermore an extremist Sinhalese Buddhist stalwart, R.G. Senanayake, declared his opposition to the committee appointed by the Minister of Local Government to look into the question. The Prime Minister thereupon directed the Minister of Local Government to refrain from taking further action on the matter. This led to the eventual withdrawal of the FP from the National Government.

The FP during its oppositional phase from 1956-65 had opposed and obstructed the MEP and SLFP governments of the period in those of their policies which adversely affected the interests of the Tamil speaking people. For instance it campaigned against the Sinhalese only Bill in 1956 and against the implementation of the policy of

Sinhalese only in the Northern and Eastern Provinces in 1961. The party used extraparliamentary methods on these occasions. In contrast, when in the ranks of government (1965-68), the party tended to support the "National Government" in its efforts to remedy some of the grievances of the Tamil-speaking people. For example the party was all in favour of the Tamil language (Special Provisions) Regulations of 1966 and Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Implementation) Act of 1968. Thus while in the ranks of government the party used conciliatory tactics and parliamentary pressure towards achieving its objectives. The party's change in strategy during this period (1965-70) was explained by the party president in his address in 1969:

In the history of our party, we have been using different methods to liberate our people. By being in opposition from the beginning, we had been opposing governments through our agitations. After the 1965 election we joined the government as a constituent partner. We were able to obstruct some dangers like the imposition of Sinhala on us, through our earlier methods of opposition. During the last four years we were able to gain some rights, if not all of what we expected, through the method of co-operation.<sup>42</sup>

As the party president claimed in 1969, the FP by following different strategies in government and opposition had been able to gain some of its demands. In comparison to

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42. S.M. Rasamanickam, Thalaimai Perurai, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, 11th Annual Convention (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1969), p. 11.

the period of 1956-65, the party was more successful in  
the period 1965-70.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The FP has played a catalytic role in Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. For more than a quarter of a century it has guided the political thinking of the Ceylon Tamils in Sri Lanka. At the same time the FP has also been influenced by the political aspirations and attitudes of the Tamil-speaking people. The concept of a Ceylonese nationalism based on a multi-ethnic nation state with a secular outlook, a concept fostered by an English educated liberal elite during the pre-independence period and for some time after "could not hold its own against the attractions of Sinhalese nationalism",<sup>1</sup> especially in the late 1950s.

Sinhalese nationalism emphasized the traditional cultural and religious patterns associated with Buddhism as well as the Sinhalese language. It tried to equate this with what it felt should be Sri Lanka nationalism.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand Tamil nationalism emphasized the separate identity of the "Tamil nation" and the traditional cultural virtues associated with the Tamil language. Further

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1. K.M. de Silva, "Nationalism and its Impact" in The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies (New Series Vol. IV, Nos. 1 & 2, December 1975), p. 69.

2. Ibid., pp. 65-66.

as K.M. de Silva remarked, "the minorities and in particular the Ceylon Tamils refused to endorse the assumption that Sinhalese nationalism was interchangeable with larger Sri Lanka nationalism."<sup>3</sup>

The FP views Sri Lanka as a nation created by Western colonial powers, particularly by the British. It has continuously reminded the Tamils of the fact that there had been an independent Tamil Kingdom in the North before the arrival of the Portuguese. It maintains that the British united the island under a unitary form of government for administrative convenience without the consent of the Tamils. The FP has consistently emphasized this fact and its claim for regional autonomy and its recent demand for a separate state is based on these assumptions.<sup>4</sup>

The rationale for the FP's emergence as a separate political force in Sri Lankan politics was to preserve the separate identity of the "Tamil-nation" and its culture. Its objectives were formulated with this fact in mind and its organization has been shaped by these considerations. In this context S.J.Eldersveld noted that "parties are unique structurally because they are groups oriented to the achievement of special goals and functions under unique environmental conditions in the society."<sup>5</sup>

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4. Ibid., p. 69.

5. Samuel J. Eldersveld, Political Parties: A Behavioral Analysis (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1964) p. 4.

According to Benjamine Akzin, there are four possible pluralistic solutions for the problems of inter-ethnic relations in a poly-ethnic state. They are (i) integration, (ii) pluralism on the basis of inequality, (iii) pluralism on the basis of equality, and (iv) secession.<sup>6</sup> He pointed out that in some poly-ethnic states, the articulate leadership of the dominant nationality would attempt at times:

... to keep the line between the nationalities clearly demarcated, reserving the dominant role in the state to one of them and relegating the others to a subordinate position. In this latter case the pattern aimed at is not one of integration but pluralism (...) on the basis of inequality.<sup>7</sup>

In Sri Lanka's case, as a result of the citizenship acts of 1948 and 1949, which disfranchised the majority of Indian Tamil Settlers in Sri Lanka and the Official Language Act of 1956, which declared the Sinhalese language as the only official language of Sri Lanka, the Tamil-ethnic group feel that they have been relegated to a position of second class citizens. Likewise, the sentiments and opinions of the Tamil-ethnic group were not taken into consideration on the questions of language and other pertinent clauses in the Constitution of 1972 dealing with religion.

Akzin argued that in the case of "pluralism on the

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6. See Benjamine Akzin, State and Nation (London: Hutchinson & Co (Publishers) Ltd., 1964).

7. Ibid., p. 44.

basis of inequality", the solutions to the problems of inter-ethnic relations:

rather than brought by the desire of secondary nationalities to have their group identities respected, are dictated by the desire of the ruling group within a dominant nationality, ... thereby obtaining a set of satisfactions for the dominant nationality and for its elite. ... and the specific method resorted will be the method of discrimination. ...<sup>8</sup>

In the case of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, as L.P. Fernando noted, "they are discriminated against by a Sinhalese-oriented government".<sup>9</sup> The FP in its role as the principal representative of the Tamil-speaking people led the opposition against discriminatory legislation enacted by Sinhalese-oriented governments. Its strategy varied with the changing political situation.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the different strategies followed by the FP in government and in opposition (1956-70). Our objective was to find answers as to why the party followed such strategies and how far and to what extent was it successful in achieving its goals. As discussed in the preceding chapters the FP followed two main strategies: (i) extra-parliamentary agitation based on Gandhian methods of non-violent resistance, and (ii) exploitation of its parliamentary strength

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8. Ibid., p. 133

9. Laksiri P. Fernando, "Political Violence in Sri Lanka: The April 1971 Youth Insurrection" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1976), p. 74.



in situations where governments were returned to office without stable majorities. It selected the first strategy because, as the FP leader explained, the open revolt was not practicable besides being unethical. The only method available to it was non-violent resistance. It chose the second because on such occasions opportunity to bargain for its demands as between the two major parties in exchange for its parliamentary support presented themselves.

One way of measuring how far and to what extent the FP was successful in its strategies is to determine how far it was successful in achieving its objectives during this period, 1956-70. The four basic objectives of the FP are:

- (i) adoption of a federal constitution to Sri Lanka.
  - (ii) parity of status for Tamil language with Sinhalese language.
  - (iii) amendment of the citizenship laws to provide citizenship to the people of Indian origin on the basis of residency in Sri Lanka.<sup>10</sup>
- and (iv) "the immediate cessation of colonizing the traditionally Tamil speaking areas with Sinhalese people."<sup>11</sup>

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10. The Federal Party of Ceylon, Ceylon Faces Crisis (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, n.d) pp. 31-32.

11. Ibid., p. 32.

When we consider the above four objectives of the FP in ascending order, the demand for the immediate cessation of colonizing the traditionally Tamil-speaking areas with Sinhalese people comes first. Of all its objectives, the FP achieved almost a complete success in this particular one.

In its agreement of 1957 with the Prime Minister, the FP obtained an understanding from the Prime Minister that his government would not utilize the instrument of colonization to contract the traditionally Tamil speaking areas. In a report on the agreement on 16-8-1957, the Prime Minister stated that:

The instrument of colonization should not be used to convert the Northern and Eastern Provinces into Sinhalese majority areas or in any other manner to the detriment of the Tamil-speaking people of those areas.<sup>12</sup>

Although this agreement was later repudiated by the Prime Minister, the understanding was nevertheless honoured.

In March 1965, the FP leader entered into a pact with Dudley Senanayake as the basis for his party's support for the formation of a "National Government". In this "Pact", Senanayake agreed that "in the granting of land under colonization schemes the following priorities would

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12. A. Amirthalingam, Thalamai Perurai; (Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi 12th Annual Convention (Jaffna: Shanmuga Pathipakam, 1973), p. 9.

be observed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces":

- (a) Lands in the Northern and Eastern Provinces should in the first instance be granted to landless persons in the District.
- (b) Secondly to Tamil speaking persons resident in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and,
- (c) Thirdly to other citizens of Ceylon preference being given to Tamil citizens in the rest of the island.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the leaders of the two main political parties, the SLFP and the UNP acceded to the demand of the FP on the question.

After 1958 no new colonists were settled in the colonization schemes in Gal Oya and Kantalai in the Eastern Province. There were unauthorized colonization in and around the Eastern Province town of Trincomalee. But this too was controlled after 1965 due to the efforts of the FP.<sup>14</sup> Thus, through its strategies in opposition (1956-65) and in government (1965-68) the FP was able to achieve maximum success in this area.

Next to the question of colonization of the traditional Tamil homelands, comes the FP's agitation for the

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13. Ibid., p. 10.

14. Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Theerthal Vingua panam (Colombo: Sutantiran Press, 1970), pp. 2-11.

amendment of the citizenship laws to enable people of Indian origin long resident in Sri Lanka to obtain citizenship rights. The FP was partially successful in this area.

The citizenship legislation enacted by the UNP government in 1948 and in 1949 which disfranchised the overwhelming majority of Indians in Sri Lanka, "became both a matter of internal politics and the subject of a continuing dispute with the government of India."<sup>15</sup> The FP and the Ceylon Indian organizations opposed the legislation and demanded its amendments. From 1950 to 1964 both the government of Ceylon and India had tried to negotiate a settlement of this issue, but without success. However, in 1964, then Prime Ministers of Ceylon and India met and after protracted discussions, came to an agreement, referred to as the Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964. At the time of this agreement there were 975,000 Indians in Sri Lanka without citizenship rights. According to the agreement 5,25,000 persons of Indian origin in Sri Lanka, together with their natural increase will be repatriated to India, while 3,00,000 of them will be granted Sri Lanka citizenship over a period of fifteen years. The status of the remaining 1,50,000 persons of Indian origin was left to be negotiated later.

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15. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1973, p. 32.

The legislation for the implementation of the above agreement was enacted by the Dudley Senanayake administration in 1968. Mainly because of pressure from the CWC and the FP, the legislation in question removed the element of compulsion in regard to the repatriation of those Indians who opted for Indian citizenship. It was also provided that Indians who had registered as Sri Lanka citizens should be included in the general electorate. Earlier, as stated, there were moves to place them in a separate electoral register.

In January 1974, the then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike visited New Delhi and had talks with the Indian Prime Minister on the question of the remaining 1,50,000 persons of Indian origin in Sri Lanka. An agreement was reached. According to its terms "it was agreed that one half of this number would be repatriated to India and the other half would be given Sri Lanka citizenship."<sup>16</sup>

The agreements between the governments of India and Sri Lanka in 1964 and 1974 ended the citizenship problems of the people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka. Little more than one third, or approximately 3,75,000 persons of Indian origin would obtain Sri Lanka citizenship. The

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16. N. Balakrishnan, "Sri Lanka in 1974: Battle for Economic Survival" in Asian Survey (Vol XV, No. 2, February 1975), p. 105.

position taken by the FP and the CWC was a factor in persuading Sri Lanka government to settle the problem with the government of India.

The next important objective of the FP is the demand for parity of official status for the Tamil language with the Sinhalese language. The party achieved considerable success in this area.

The official language legislation enacted by the Bandaranaike government in 1956, declared "the Sinhala language to be one official language" of Sri Lanka. The FP conducted its sit-down protest demonstration in 1956 to make known its opposition to this Bill. Thereafter, through its threatened satyagraha campaign, the FP forced the Prime Minister, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, to come to an agreement with its leader, Chelvanayakam, in 1957. The agreement provided for recognition of Tamil as the language of a national minority in Sri Lanka. Although Bandaranaike abrogated this agreement in 1957, he enacted legislation in 1958 for "the reasonable use of the Tamil language", known as the Tamil language (Special Provisions) Act. The act provided for the use of the Tamil language for prescribed administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. It also recognized the Tamil language as a medium of instruction in schools, including the Universities, and as a medium of examination for admission to the public services.

The regulations for the implementation of the Tamil act was enacted by the "National Government" in 1966, in which the FP was a constituent partner. The regulations specified that the Tamil language should be used in the Northern and Eastern Provinces for all government and public business. It also provided for correspondence in the Tamil language between government officials on the one hand and private individuals and local government bodies in the Northern and Eastern Provinces on the other.

The Tamil language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958 and the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Regulations of 1966, legally recognized the fact of parity of status for the Tamil language with the Sinhalese language in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Thus, the FP through its constant agitations achieved official status for the Tamil language in two of the nine Provinces of Sri Lanka.

One of the important objectives of the FP is the demand for the adoption of a federal constitution for Sri Lanka. In this objective the party was not successful. However, the leaders of the two major parties, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake, had agreed in principle, for a measure of regional autonomy for the Tamil-speaking areas in 1957 and 1965 respectively.

In the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam agreement in 1957, Bandaranaike agreed to the setting up of regional councils "with powers over specified subjects including agriculture,

co-operatives, land and land development, colonization, education, industries and fisheries, housing ..."<sup>17</sup>

However, this agreement was not implemented.

In 1965, before the formation of the "National Government", Dudley Senanayake entered into a pact with the FP leader. This pact was the basis on which the FP decided to support Senanayake to form a government. Under this pact, Senanayake agreed to the setting up of district councils under the direct supervision of the central government. Consequently, Senanayake presented a White Paper on District Councils in the House of Representatives in 1968. Clause 29(4) of the White Paper stated that:

it shall be the duty of a district council to make reasonable provision within the district in respect of the subjects specified in the schedule and to execute or maintain works or development schemes in the district relating to any such subjects.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, Senanayake had to abandon this proposal due to widespread opposition from Sinhalese nationalist groups. The FP was successful only to that it had compelled the two major parties to agree to its demand for regional autonomy for the Tamil speaking areas. Thus the FP was

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17. The Federal Party of Ceylon, Ceylon Faces Crises, p. 35.

18. See Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) House of Representatives Official Report (Ceylon: Government Press, Vol. 78, 1968), column 3031.



not able to make any concrete progress towards achieving this objective. However by its propaganda and constant campaigning, the party did instil a sense of nationalism among the Tamil-speaking people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. These people had developed a desire to be independent if not in a sovereign way, at least for many other purposes.

From the above assessment one can measure the success of the FP's strategy in opposition and in government, 1956-70. Of the four basic objectives the FP achieved a complete success in one (colonization), a partial success in another (citizenship), a reasonable amount of success in the third (Tamil language), and though it failed in the fourth (federalism) it was nevertheless successful in making the Tamil speaking people aware of the urgency of a homeland if they are to preserve their culture and separate identity.

The hypothesis of this study is that the FP achieved some of its objectives because it followed alternate strategies rather than confining itself to one, namely Parliament. Our analysis of the FP's strategy and our assessment of its achievement confirms the hypothesis. The information we have presented, and the evaluations we have made supports this hypothesis.

The normal avenues of parliamentary agitation are in themselves inadequate for a minor party, especially

if it is the instrument of an ethnic minority. It cannot hope to influence the policies of government because it is of necessity in a permanent minority situation in Parliament. In the circumstances it is compelled to formulate alternate strategies to enable it the better to function more effectively in Parliament.

It will be appropriate at this stage to analyse the role of the FP from 1970 to 1977 in the context of recent political developments in Sri Lanka and to speculate on the probable course it might take in the future. The United Front (UF) comprising the SLFP, the LSSP and the CP was returned with an overwhelming majority at the general election of May 1970, and formed a new government. In 1971, this UF Government convened a constituent assembly to draw up a new constitution with the intention of declaring Sri Lanka a republic. The FP was invited to participate in the deliberation of the constituent assembly. It submitted a memorandum setting out its own constitutional scheme based on the federal principle. The memorandum was rejected by the assembly and the FP withdrew from the body in protest.

Thereafter, the FP in a special convention in the Jaffna (the northern capital of the Ceylon Tamils) Town Hall in January 1972, passed a resolution rejecting the new constitution drawn up by the UF Government. It was resolved at this convention to consult other Tamil

political parties so as to take a unanimous stand against the new constitution. Accordingly, the leaders of all Tamil political parties met at Valvettithurai, a northern town, in February 1972. This all-party conference decided to submit a memorandum for the amendment of the constitution on the basis of a six point formula drafted by the Tamil leaders.<sup>19</sup>

Following the all-party conference in Jaffna, the several Tamil political parties and Trade Unions met in Trincomalee in May 1972 and formed a Tamil United Front (TUF).<sup>20</sup> The adoption of the 1972 Republican Constitution was the immediate catalyst for the formation of the TUF. The UF Government did not give serious consideration to the TUF's six-point formula nor did it invite the TUF leaders to discuss these demands. As a result the FP began to talk about the establishment of an independent Tamil State.

In further protest, the TUF President, Chelvanayakam, resigned his seat in the National State Assembly<sup>21</sup> on

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19. N. Sivapatham, Thamilar Chelvam Chelva (Atchuveli, Sri Lanka: Thamayanthi Pathipakam, February 1977), pp. 32-33.

20. Ibid., p. 33.

21. With the inauguration of the new Republican Constitution, the House of Representatives was renamed as National State Assembly and the Senate was abolished.

30th October 1972 to emphasize the opposition of the Tamils to the new constitution. After this resignation, the question of a separate state for Tamils became a subject of serious discussion in TUF forums. The UF Government postponed for two years the by-election for the vacant seat. It was finally held in 1974. The by-election was fought by Chelvanayakam on the twin issues of "rejection of the new constitution" and "restoration of the Tamil State". The UF Government nominated V. Ponnambalam (C.P) as its candidate at the by-election. Chelvanayakam defeated the UF nominee by an overwhelming majority.<sup>22</sup>

Akzin has pointed out that when a secondary national group is dissatisfied with its position within the state, it demands separation.<sup>23</sup> The twelfth annual convention of the FP held in Mallakam, a northern town, in September 1973, endorsed the policy of the TUF, namely the setting up of a separate state for the Tamils. Speaking at the National State Assembly on 19-6-1976, Chelvanayakam said:

We started the federal movement at one time to obtain the lost rights of the Tamil-speaking people and now we have found that through

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22. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, A Memorandum From the Tamils of Sri Lanka to All Delegates Attending the Spring Meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka: Alfred House Gardens, 1975), pp. 2-3.

23. B. Akzin, State and Nation, p. 163.

federalism we cannot achieve our objective. In view of this experience we have come to the conclusion that we must separate and if we do not do that, the Tamil-speaking people will never be able to get back their lost rights.<sup>24</sup>

The most striking political development in the Tamil speaking areas during this period is the appearance of militant Tamil youth organizations and their involvement in political activities. As Kearney noted:

A rapidly worsening employment situation was felt with particular severity by Tamil youths, as they suffered not only from the general dearth of employment opportunities but from disadvantages and discrimination in obtaining the few existing jobs.<sup>25</sup>

As a result large section of Tamil youth have become frustrated and restive. Following the 1971 youth insurrection in the Sinhalese areas "a new militancy began to appear among Tamil youths."<sup>26</sup> Reports on violent activities of Tamil youths in the North, and stockpiling weapons for violent action by them indicate that they are intent on taking a different political course. These youth organizations are ardent supporters of the TUF policy of a separate Tamil independent state and have become a strong pressure group within the TUF.

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24. Sutantiran, Tamil Weekly Newspaper, Colombo: May 1, 1977.

25. R.N. Kearney, "Political Mobilization in Contemporary Sri Lanka" in Aspects of Political Mobilization in South Asia ed. by Robert I. Crane (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1975), pp. 49-50.

26. Ibid., p. 50.

The death of the Tamil United Liberation Front's (TULF)<sup>27</sup> President Chelvanayakam, in April 1977, removed a moderate Tamil politician from Sri Lanka's political scene. The leadership of the TULF tends now to be concentrated in uncompromising young leaders.

At the 1977 general election, the UNP secured a landslide victory by winning 140 out of 168 seats in the National State Assembly. The SLFP suffered a crushing defeat. It won only eight seats. The TULF was returned from all the fourteen constituencies in the Northern Province and four in the Eastern Province. The TULF general secretary Amirthalingam was elected the leader of the opposition.

The general elections of 1970 and 1977 had proved to the FP (TULF) leadership that they could not depend on their strategy of utilizing their parliamentary strength in the context of an unstable parliamentary situation, because at both these elections, the UF and the UNP were returned to parliament with overwhelming majorities. As a result the TULF is now more dependent on its alternate strategy of extra-parliamentary agitation. For instance, Amirthalingam, in an interview with Ceylon Daily News correspondent in November 1977, said that:

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27. In 1975, the action committee of the Tamil United Front (TUF) met in Jaffna and decided to change their Front's name to Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF).

If the Government failed to take any meaningful steps towards the solving of the problems facing the Tamils within a reasonable period of time, then the TULF would launch a struggle or start a civil disobedience campaign against the Government.<sup>28</sup>

Further, in a recent interview with the B.B.C's correspondent, Mark Tulley, in October 1977, Amirthalingam said that while the TULF could not abandon their policy of separate state, "the TULF leadership could convince their own young militants of the desirability of an interim settlement, if the terms were broadly acceptable."<sup>29</sup> The above statements of Amirthalingam clearly indicate that the TULF is ready for a negotiated settlement of the Tamil problem within the context of the present political setup.

In February 1978, the Prime Minister J.R. Jeyawardane assumed the post of first (executive) President of the Republic, following the amendment to the Republican Constitution enacted by the National State Assembly. The TULF declined to participate in the debate on this amendment.

Two important factors might be taken into consideration in any speculation as to the future of the TULF. Firstly, no Sinhalese parties or politicians would concede the TULF demand for a separate state for the Tamils, and secondly, unless the present Government takes early and meaningful steps to solve the problems facing the Tamil

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28. The Scribe, "Party Roundup: The TULF" in Tribune: Ceylon News Review (Vol. 22, No. 23, November 1977), p. 16.

29. Ibid., p. 18.

minority, the TULF will not be able to abandon its platform of independence, especially because of strong pressure from its militant youth component.

With more executive power vested in the office of President, there is the likelihood of the President taking steps to settle the Tamil problem in the near future. With his plan of appointing district ministers outside the cabinet in charge of development programmes, this could well be a substitute for the regional autonomy that the FP has been agitating for. If he fails, then a confrontation between the two communities cannot be avoided. The solution of the problem of the minorities would then be left to new left (youth) organizations which are emerging in the country with constant rapidity. They would possibly come to an understanding with the Tamil youth organizations.

It is the FP that has dominated the TULF since its formation. There is no evidence so far of divisive tendencies among the groups in the Front. As such the likelihood is that the FP would continue to dominate it. On the other hand the Front faces pressures from militant Tamil youth. Unless the TULF succeeds in accommodating these Tamil youth within their political fold, there is a possibility of these youth forming their own separate political organization. Thus the future of the FP and the TULF has become increasingly dependent on the political attitude of Tamil youth in question. On a long term perspective



the solution of the problems of the Tamil minority would greatly depend on the political stances of youths of the country (both Sinhalese and Tamil).

Our conclusions are:

- (1) When the dominant nationality in a multi-ethnic nation fails to accommodate minority groups, there arises the tendency of such groups forming their own separate political organizations which could safeguard their identity and their rights.
- (2) The goals of such political parties would be normally directed towards exclusively protecting their political privileges, if any, their language and their culture as well as obtaining for their groups sufficient educational and employment opportunities.
- (3) Under a democratic system, a party representing an ethnic minority would always be in a permanent minority situation in Parliament. It cannot hope to win a majority or influence the decisions of a ruling party, because its goals would be exclusively focused on safeguarding the interests of the minority group it represents.
- (4) In such circumstances a party of this type is compelled to find alternate strategies other than conditional to achieve its objectives. Normal parliamentary methods like voting, debating or negotiation will not be adequate for its purposes.

- (5) Extra-parliamentary agitation is one alternate strategy available to an ethnic minority party. Non-violent resistance may be used as a method of extra-parliamentary agitation. Through hartal, satyagraha and civil-disobedience, a party can pressure a government to concede some of its demands.
- (6) Exploiting its parliamentary strength in an unstable political situation is yet another alternate strategy available to such a party. Opportunities of this kind arise occasionally. An ethnic minority party can take advantage of the occasion and can make demands on the major parties in return for its parliamentary support.
- (7) The success of the strategy of an ethnic minority party depends on two factors: (i) whether the demands of the party are within the realm of practicality as far as the major party is concerned, and (ii) whether the leadership of the major party is sufficiently farseeing as to realise the need for accommodating the minority in the long term context of maintaining national unity and engendering economic development.

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