

Some extracts from the Sansoni Commission report

Mr. Wijitha Nakkawita, in his review of Dr. Nalin de Silva's booklet "Budu Dāhama Paava Dima," (Island 25th January), has made reference to the Report of the Sansoni Commission that took place between 13th August and 15th September, 1977.

I have a copy of that Report and I give below some extracts from it which may be of interest to those of your readers who are keen to know the difference between the theory and practice of Gandhian principles of non-violence when applied to politics.

— Stanley Jayaweera

"But it struck me that Mahatma Gandhi, whose leadership and example have so often been referred to, would have spurned to follow the course pursued by Mr. Amirthalingam; for Mahatma proclaimed that Civil Disobedience was his objective and the course of action he had decided to follow. He gave the government of India ample opportunities to prosecute him for breaches of the law, he submitted himself to the penalties prescribed by the laws he broke, he went to prison on innumerable occasions, and on one memorable day when he was brought before a Magistrate he urged that he should be given the maximum penalty, for that was the only way the Magistrate could properly carry out his duty. The Mahatma never permitted any lawyer to adduce arguments against the validity of the laws he intended to break, nor indeed (as far as I am aware) did he permit any lawyer to appear for him and try to secure his acquittal.

Mahatma Gandhi fought for independence, but throughout his life he preached and practised non-violence. As Viscount Samuel said of him: "protest, persuasion, disobedience if need be; but not force, not killing of opponents, not outrage, not rebellion, that was and is his message. It is conduct that is essentially religious, in the best sense of that word — what other man looking back on his record, can survey achievements such as these, leadership in

destroy them, and most regrettable of all the failure of his part members to open their eyes to the commission of such crimes to express their sympathy towards the victims, be believed, was all done peacefully and without violence."

I have digressed from my account of the events which Mr. Senewiratne was describing, because I wished to emphasise the difference between the practice of the Gandhian principles possessed by the TULF and the practice of then by the Sinhalese. I was said of Gandhi that "he was an entirely new kind of rebel, filled with love and devoted to non-violence, always faithfully warning his opponent of what he was going to do before he did it. He wished to induct religion into politics, for he believed that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means. Politics without religion are a death-trap because they kill the soul". The TULF carried out their campaign of Civil Disobedience year after year in their own way, and they probably thought that by doing so they would achieve their goal of a separate state. To my mind, they were creating a very bad impression on the successive government that ruled Sri Lanka and the rest of the people of the country, because the use of force and violence is not the lawful or constitutional way to win a fight for freedom.

The use of the label "Gandhian" to describe the methods by which they intended to win their struggle is completely unjustified, for there is no similarity whatever between their methods and the methods prescribed by the methods prescribed by that great man. No religion worthy of that name tolerates violence, or that Gandhi would have countenanced such a method.

In 1976 the non-aligned nations held their Conference at Colombo from 4th to 22nd August. The TULF chose this period to indulge in a campaign of violence presumably to draw the attention of

the world leaders who attended it to the plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The method adopted was to commit criminal offences in Jaffna; such as burning buses and railway carriages, blowing up a transformer at Mavittapuram, and other acts against government property, and even an attempted murder of Mr. Arulampalam on 4th August. Mr. Senewiratne has mentioned 3 instances of railway carriages being set on fire and 4 instances of C.T.B. buses having been attacked in the same way. In one case he said, the Police had to fire when a bus was stopped, the conductor's collections were looted, and the bus set on fire.

It is both regrettable and significant that no sympathy or regret was expressed by the TULF, or by the terrorist youths over the

deaths of these officers. Equally disturbing is the fact that none of these murders has been solved, no culprits have been traced, and no evidence has been forthcoming in regard to the circumstances under which the murderers did their foul deeds. What is indisputable and points the finger of guilt against the TULF and their youthful allies as the culprits, is that in meeting after meeting held by the TULF, and their associates the speakers have repeatedly attacked the Police and referred to them as "Police dogs". Not a single case has been mentioned where any Sinhalese has used this term of abuse against the Police in the Northern Province.

I may comment again at this point on the TULF's claim to be following the Gandhian ideals and principles. Nothing could be further from the truth. I quote from a letter which Mahatma Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy (Lord Irwin) on 2nd March, 1930: "My personal faith is absolutely clear. I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less human beings even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst, therefore, I hold the British rule to be a curse, I do not intend harm to a single Englishman or to any legitimate interest he may have in India". I suggest that those who profess to follow Gandhian ideals and principles should ponder

over those words and try to live according to those principles. Having completed the grim story of the murders of Police officers, I might mention 3 cases where Police informants were killed in 1978. On 14th January, one Thangarajah, an informant of Inspector Thamotheerampillai was killed; on 14th November, an informant Poppatasingham who gave certain information regarding the detention of the "Avro" aircraft was killed; and on 13th December, another informant named Selvaraja was killed after he gave information about the Nallur Bank robbery. On 21st March, 1979, a Police informant of Amirthalingam was shot dead.

This officer also produced notes of a speech made by Mavai Senathirajah at that meeting, he said, "A Tamil State is a must for us. We can never achieve this objective by following the path of non-violence. This can be achieved only by waging war by means of weapons. After this election we will have to take up arms and fight". The officer had made notes in Tamil which was the language in which these speeches were made. I am satisfied that he correctly recorded what was stated by the speakers. Another officer of the same Bureau who gave evidence in camera said that he covered a meeting held by the TULF on the beach

at Vavunitturai on 30th July, 1977, for the purpose of according a reception to the victorious M.P.P. of the T.U.L.F. at which a speech was made by Kasi Anandan. He recorded that speech in the course of which the following was said: "The path of non-violence will never be of any help in achieving our independence. We can achieve our independence only by waging war with weapons. For this purpose our youths must flock to us in their thousands". Another speaker at that meeting was A. Amirthalingam whose speech was noted by this witness, in the course of which he

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said: "All this time we got no opportunity to fight for our rights. I see that our youths are ever ready to fight with arms. We will tell you when the time comes. Then you will come forward."

I am satisfied that this speech also was correctly recorded in Tamil, the language in which it was made. It directly contradicts Mr. Amirthalingam's claim that he has never made any inflammatory statements, and that anyone who says he did he has been tutored to perjure. He claimed in evidence, that he had stated in Parliament that his party dissociated themselves from acts of violence; but it is obvious that he was consorting with youths who repeatedly said and

showed, that they would resort to violence and in fact did so. As far back as 24th May, 1972, at a protest meeting against the 1972 Constitution held by the TULF, Kasi Anandan's words "Those who voted for this Constitution will not die a natural death" surely should have shown Mr. Amirthalingam that the methods favoured by the Tamil youths were far different from the Gandhian methods, where this struggle for freedom was concerned.

I want to make it quite clear, that what is objectionable and worthy of condemnation in the speeches from which I have quoted, is the expression of views which en-

courage and instigate the use of violence and weapons in the bid to obtain a separate State. So far, as the population of the whole island is concerned, the claim to a separate State is unpopular and will be resisted by the majority community in tolerance and persecution of those who hold and express minority opinions is wrong. So also is the killing of those who oppose or obstruct the achievement of the aims which a minority desires to achieve. It must be remembered that violence or the advocacy of it begets violence and that is one lesson which the disturbance of August and September, 1977, should have taught us all."