

## **Sri Lanka: D. S. Senanayake and the Passage to Dominion Status, 1942 - 1947\***

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In the context of the British colonial experience in Asia and Africa, the transfer of power in Sri Lanka was unusual for a number of reasons. For one thing, it was a peaceful process, in striking contrast to the situation in the Indian sub-continent and Burma. Secondly she provides a rare example of power being transferred through the electoral process, and completely democratically and constitutionally, from the original legatee of the British to a successor. Thirdly, the final phase in the transfer of power, 1942 to 1947, was dominated so far as Sri Lanka was concerned by one man, D. S. Senanayake.

In all his negotiations with Britain he was guided by a strong belief in ordered constitutional evolution to Dominion Status on the analogy of the white dominions. In insisting that Dominion Status should remain the primary objective and that this should be attained in association with rather than in opposition to the British, he stood against the prevailing current of opinion in the Ceylon National Congress that Independence rather than Dominion Status should be the goal for Sri Lanka's leaders. Secondly, to a much greater extent than the bulk of his colleagues and associates in the national leadership, he understood the implications of the fact that Sri Lanka was a plural society, and his policies for the transfer of power — and in the early years of independence — were framed on that realistic basis. The guiding principles were: his conception of Sri Lanka as a multi-racial democracy, and a multi-racial state without any special or exclusive association with any ethnic group, or any section of an ethnic group; and his commitment to the ideal of a secular state in which the lines between state and religion were scrupulously demarcated. Here again he placed himself in opposition to an increasingly influential current of opinion which viewed the Sri Lanka polity as being essentially Sinhalese and Buddhist in character and which rejected the concepts of a secular state and a multi-racial polity.

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This paper is in the nature of a brief exercise in historical revision, an examination of how the outline I sketched in 1971 — 72 based on published material and Colonial Office records released up to that time stands up against the new information now available to us in confidential Cabinet and Colonial Office papers.<sup>1</sup> In 1974 the first revision was attempted: it changed the picture quite substantially in regard to the events of 1942-43<sup>2</sup>; the present paper brings the years 1944 to 1946 into sharper focus.

But first we need to go back to 1942 for a brief look at the background at the time when D. S. Senanayake took over as leader of the Ministerial group in the island. A robust personality and an astute politician, Senanayake came to dominate the State Council and the Board of Ministers, unlike his predecessor, the scholarly and ageing D. B. Jayatilaka.

The first point to note is that the consensus on constitutional reform which Sir Andrew Caldecott, the governor of the island, and Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for the Colonies, had negotiated in 1938-9 was shattered in the years 1940-42 by the force of events in the island and in the world at large. The most important of these was of course the outbreak of the second world war, which led to the decision at the Colonial Office in late 1940 to postpone, till after the war was over, the consideration of the granting of constitutional reform in the island. Caldecott was quite unwilling to accept this decision and protested strongly against it, but to no avail. The decision was confirmed and announced as official policy at the end of 1941. At the beginning of 1942 the moderate wing — by far the most influential — of the nationalist movement no longer regarded itself as bound by the compromise of 1938-39, and were set on Dominion Status as their objective. Within a year the younger policy-makers, who were increasingly influential within the Ceylon National Congress, succeeded in getting that organization to reject Dominion Status for the more emotionally satisfying concept of Independence.

Senanayake's negotiations with Caldecott and through him with Whitehall began against the background of a deteriorating military situation in South and South-East Asia. Japan had overrun Burma, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines, and was threatening the northeast frontier of India. When in 1944 the headquarters of

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1. "The History and Politics of the Transfer of Power", in K. M. de Silva (ed), *The University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1973, Vol. III, pp. 489-533, particularly pp. 515-533.
  2. "The Transfer of Power in Sri Lanka -- a review of British perspectives", in *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Vol. IV 1974 (1 & 2), pp. 8-19.

Mountbatten's South-East Asia command was established in Kandy, Sri Lanka's strategic importance in the Allies' war effort was underscored; she became the bridgehead for the destruction of Japanese power, and a vital link in the supply line to the Soviet Union *via* the Persian Gulf.

On 5 March 1942 Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in the island. His authority was not restricted to the armed forces but extended to the civil government as well – he was authorized to use the governor's reserve powers under the constitution to any extent he desired or thought fit. Indeed, Layton's powers were so wide-ranging that clashes with the civil government – the Governor and the Board of Ministers – seemed inevitable, and there were fears that friction between the Board of Ministers and the Commander-in-Chief could lead to a constitutional breakdown.

For Senanayake, the powers conferred on Layton and the establishment of a War Council in the island on Layton's initiative and under his control were new and unpredictable complications that confronted him in his campaign for constitutional reform. There were fears, too, that the island's strategic importance in the struggle against Japan would be a further constraint.

What happened, however, was that Senanayake soon established a cordial working relationship with Layton and Caldecott. The Board of Ministers gave their unstinted support to the war effort, and as a result Senanayake found that the island's strategic importance strengthened his bargaining powers.

In early 1942 Caldecott and Layton between them took the initiative in reopening the question of constitutional reform for Sri Lanka by urging Whitehall to respond to the spirit of co-operation demonstrated by the Board of Ministers with a new declaration of policy on constitutional reform that would "meet the desires and aspirations of the more moderate elements in Ceylon". The British government responded to this in December 1942 with a fresh statement of views on the reform of the island's constitution, but Caldecott and Layton regarded it as falling well short of what was required to meet the wishes of Senanayake and the Board of Ministers. They warned the War Cabinet that, unless a more positive declaration was forthcoming, they expected "immediate and progressive loss of co-operation and decrease of war effort, coupled with the deflection of now moderate opinion towards intransigent nationalism and the demand for the right of secession".<sup>3</sup> At the same time, they sent

3. Co 54/980, File 55541/5, Caldecott's "personal and secret" despatches to Stanley, 27 January 1943 and 17 February 1943

home a very carefully drafted document setting out a declaration of policy on constitutional reform in Ceylon, for Whitehall approval, which they hoped would be substituted for that sent by the Colonial Office in December 1942. The principles enunciated in this document were eventually endorsed by the Colonial Office and the War Cabinet and published in the island on 26 May 1943, using much the same phrasology used by Caldecott and Layton.

A comparison of the two declarations, that of December 1942 and that of 26 May 1943, is very revealing. In both, no hope is held out about any changes during the war. But the second "definitely committed [Great Britain] to a far-reaching reform after the war". Where the first merely promised "the fullest possible development of self-governing institutions within the Commonwealth", the second offered "full responsibility for government under the Crown in all matters of civil administration". The only matters to be reserved would be external relations and defence, "while of course the proposals [did] not include the right of secession. Thus constitutionally, Ceylon while not attaining full Dominion Status, would be very much in the position... occupied [then] by Southern Rhodesia."<sup>4</sup>

In external affairs, a major concession had been made by 1943. This was with regard to the Indian question, the status of Indians resident in Sri Lanka, specifically their right to the franchise. The original recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission on this point had led to a public outcry in Ceylon, and Governor Stanley had taken the initiative in modifying these substantially in order to gain acceptance of the main proposals of the Commission on the fundamental political and constitutional problems of the island. But Sinhalese politicians were unwilling to regard Stanley's compromise as a permanent settlement of this crucial issue. In November 1940 D. S. Senanayake led an official Ceylon government delegation (the other members included S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, G. C. S. Corea, and the Financial Secretary, H. J. Huxham) to new Delhi to discuss these questions, especially that of the franchise of the Indian plantation workers, with the Indian government. But little headway towards a settlement was made on this occasion, as well as in 1941 when a senior Indian official, Sri Girja Bajpai, led an Indian delegation to Ceylon on the same issues.

4. Co 54/980, File 55541/5, Stanley, Secret Cabinet paper on "The Ceylon Constitution", WP (43) 129 of 27 March 1943.

An important point about D. S. Senanayake's mission to India needs mention at this stage. Under the Donoughmore Constitution, external affairs came under the purview of the Chief Secretary. But the despatch of an official mission to India under D. S. Senanayake's leadership meant that, with regard to the crucial question of the Indian problem in Ceylon, the Board of Ministers was given the right to negotiate on behalf of the country. This was taken a stage further when a Ceylon Government representative to New Delhi was appointed — D. B. Jayatilaka — who took up the post early in 1943. Thus, at the time when D. S. Senanayake assumed the leadership in the negotiations on the transfer of power, the Board of Ministers had been conceded the right to speak on behalf of the country on one of the most crucial aspects of its external relations.

While a reform of the constitution was postponed till after the war and the Donoughmore structure was maintained intact formally, there was nevertheless a transformation in practice and by convention. The Board of Ministers became in all but name a quasi-Cabinet, and D. S. Senanayake himself very much a Chief Minister. There was correspondingly a reduction in the power and influence of the State Council and Executive Committees. The latter were soon dominated by their chairmen, who became Ministers in fact, and the committees were reduced to the status of advisory standing committees. If the exigencies of the war compelled this transformation, it was eased by the more ready availability of finances to support the welfare measures which became a feature of the last years of the Second State Council. The Board of Ministers, in control of the finances, were able to reward their supporters by making provision for projects and ventures in which the latter were interested.

D. S. Senanayake's resignation from the Ceylon National Congress in 1943, though no doubt precipitated by the entry of the Communists into that body, was also a carefully calculated move. Firstly, it was an attempt to demonstrate his severance of ties with an organization which had still not regained the confidence of the minorities. Earlier, the election of a Tamil, A. Mahadeva (son of Ponnambalam Arunachalam), as Minister of Home Affairs in place of Sir D. B. Jayatilaka, which D. S. Senanayake master-minded, heralded a well publicized abandonment of the principle of a pan-Sinhalese Ministry. Besides, he wanted as free a hand as possible in the negotiations on constitutional reform and to keep these under his personal control, though he would, of course, consult his colleagues in the Board of Ministers and seek the support, when that was

at all necessary, of the State Council. But, beyond this, he did not feel himself called upon to consult any political organizations, including the Congress, especially when he knew that their policies would run counter to those he advocated.

The first task that confronted him was to formulate a draft constitution on the basis of the conditions laid down in the Secretary of State's declaration of 26 May 1943, and the clarification of this given on 11 July 1943.<sup>5</sup> There were three points of importance in this declaration: first, that the Donoughmore system would be abandoned, and there would be a return to the Westminster model in Ceylon's constitutional structure; secondly, the semi-responsible status conferred in 1931 would be further strengthened though it would fall short of responsible government. The internal control of the imperial government - the Governor's reserve powers, and the Officers of State - would be abandoned and there would be full responsible status in internal civil matters, while the Crown's reserve powers would be retained as the basis of the external control of the imperial government. Three important features of the Crown's reserve powers would be: the limitations set upon the scope of the Ceylon legislature in regard to legislation discriminating against religious or communal minorities; the Crown's constituent powers; and, finally - and most important of all - control of defence and external affairs. The new constitutional structure would guarantee the attainment of internal sovereignty, while external sovereignty would lag behind. The third important feature of the declaration had to do with the requirement that a constitution framed on these lines had to be approved by a three-fourths majority of all members of the State Council, excluding the three British Officers of State and the Speaker, or any other presiding officer - a degree of support which was well beyond the reach of any draft constitution which did not incorporate meaningful concessions and guarantees to the minorities.

### The Ministers' Draft Constitution of 1944 and the Soulbury Commission

The preparation of a draft constitution that would meet the requirements of the declaration of 1943 was a challenge to the statesmanship and political acumen of Senanayake and the Board of Ministers. They and his advisers<sup>6</sup> worked with remarkable speed, and by the

5. Ceylon S[essional] P[aper] XVII of 1943.

6. His chief adviser on constitutional affairs was W. I. (later Sir Ivor) Jennings; then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ceylon.

beginning of 1944 a draft, the Ministers' Draft Constitution<sup>7</sup> as it came to be called, was ready for submission to Whitehall. On the whole it bore the stamp of Senanayake's influence, especially in the concessions made to the minorities. The speed with which they had completed their work was due to a large extent to the fact that nobody outside the Board of Ministers, not even members of the State Council, had been invited to participate in the preparation of the draft constitution. While this was not contrary to the terms of the declaration of 1943, it was nevertheless one of the criticisms of the draft constitution raised by the more vocal representatives of Tamil opinion and by British business interests in the island.

Under the terms of the declaration of May 1943 it was envisaged that this draft constitution would be examined by a "suitable commission or conference" after victory over the Axis powers had been achieved. Once the draft was ready, Senanayake and the Board of Ministers pressed for an immediate consideration of their scheme. Senanayake argued that urgent local circumstances made an early decision on the constitution a matter of vital necessity. He was supported in this by Caldecott and Layton, but the most convincing case for the appointment of a constitutional commission before the cessation of hostilities was made by Lord Louis Mountbatten, who, as Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia Command, was consulted, and whose views were largely responsible for overcoming the original reluctance of the Colonial Office and the War Cabinet to concede Senanayake's request.<sup>8</sup> This reluctance was so strong that the decision could well have gone against Senanayake, had Mountbatten not intervened.

The official announcement with regard to the appointment of a Commission to visit Ceylon was made on 5 July 1944, but, far from being received with cordiality and a sense of satisfaction at the extraction of an important concession, it was greeted in Ministerial circles in Colombo with undisguised dismay. The point at issue was the widening of the scope of the Commission's terms of reference well beyond that set out in the declaration of May 1943, from an examination of the draft constitution prepared by the Board of Ministers under the terms of that declaration, to consultations also with "various interests, including the minority communities, concerned with the subject of constitutional reform in Ceylon". Senanayake and his colleagues in the Board of Ministers argued

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7. SP XIV of 1944.

8. See Mountbatten's Telegram of May 22 1944 (Marked "Top Secret") to the Chiefs of Staff. Co 54/986, 55541/5, War Cabinet 77 (44). Conclusions of meeting 13 of 1944.

that this amounted to an abrogation of one of the terms of the declaration of 1943, and urged that the terms of reference of the Commission should be restricted to the scope set out in that declaration, which meant in effect that the Commission's work would be limited to an examination of the Ministers' Draft Constitution. They added that the requirement of a three-fourths majority in the State Council was quite adequate as protection for the minorities.

The Ministers' protests were overruled and the terms of reference of the Commission were not changed when the appointment of a Chairman (Lord Soulbury) and members of the Commission was announced on 20 September 1944. In view of the anxieties of the minorities over the protection of their legitimate rights in any new constitutional arrangements, Whitehall could hardly have come to any other decision. Contrary to the impression created in Sri Lanka that the widening of the Commission's terms of reference was due in the main to pressure from Caldecott and his British advisers in the island, the recently released Colonial Office papers clearly show that the initiative in this came from Whitehall, apparently in response to criticisms made by minority representatives (Tamils in the main) about the manner in which the Ministers' constitutional proposals had been prepared.

Senanayake believed that Caldecott had let him down on this, and as a result relations between them were rather strained in the last few months of Caldecott's tour of duty as Governor of the island. But more importantly Senanayake and the Board of Ministers resolved on an official boycott of the Commission as an expression of their disapproval at the widening of its terms of reference. In practice, this meant merely that they did not appear before the Commission at its public sittings. Intermediaries conveyed their views to the Commission; Senanayake and the Ministers had private meetings with the Commissioners, and they met the Commissioners at public gatherings at which they - the Commissioners - were guests of honour. Above all, although the Ministers did not present their draft Constitution before the Commission, the latter regarded the examination of that document as their main task during their stay in the island.

Once the Commission had left the island, Senanayake decided on his own course of action - to be in London in time for the publication of its report. If that document was favourable, he would ask for more, for Dominion Status in fact; but, if it was unsatisfactory, he would repudiate it and refuse to be any longer bound by the declaration of 1943, which the British Government itself had disowned in regard to the Commission's



terms of reference. In a conciliatory gesture the then Secretary of State, Oliver Stanley, readily consented to extend an invitation to Senanayake to visit London.

### **Senanayake's Mission to Whitehall, August-September 1945**

When he reached London in mid-July, he found that events were moving with remarkable rapidity. He met Stanley on 16 July for the first time, and was promised a copy of the Soulbury report. On the 25th, the Conservatives were swept out of power at the general election. It meant, inevitably, that no immediate response was likely from the new government to the Soulbury proposals. It was on 9 August that Senanayake met Hall, the new Secretary of State for the Colonies. At this meeting he was given a proof copy of the Soulbury report

On the international scene, the war in the East was over with dramatic suddenness, and this, too, contributed to the delay in the Cabinet review of the Soulbury proposals, for its energies were now concentrated on the more urgent task, the formulation of policy on the diplomatic and political consequences of Japan's defeat. The change in the international situation affected Senanayake's attitude to the Soulbury proposals, too. Had circumstances been different, that is to say, had the war with Japan not come to a sudden end, Senanayake would have been elated to find that the Soulbury Commissioners had in fact endorsed the main principles of the Ministers' Draft Constitution of 1944. But the war was over and there was no reason, therefore, for accepting anything short of Dominion status.

Secret Cabinet documents and the Colonial Office records for 1945 give us a much fuller picture of what transpired between Senanayake and the Labour government during his negotiations with them in August-September 1945. Indeed, drastic revisions are required in the outline sketched in 1973 and 1975 on Senanayake's proposals, and the Labour Government's response.

When Senanayake had met Hall on 16 August and had been given a proof copy of the Soulbury report, it was expected that the two sides would meet again soon to outline their respective attitudes to its proposals. It was on 4 September that they met next. The Cabinet was too preoccupied with the problems stemming from Japan's surrender to have much time for the comparatively unimportant issue of constitutional reform in Sri Lanka. When it met on 3 September, it instructed Hall to inform Senanayake that the Labour government was not committed to the conclusions in the Soulbury report and that these were to be regarded as

merely the basis for discussion.<sup>9</sup> Senanayake took a completely different line. Hall summarized Senanayake's views to the Cabinet Colonial Affairs Committee thus: "... his principal plea was that Ceylon Ministers had originally accepted the 1943 Declaration as a basis for interim reforms which would enable them to increase the war effort of Ceylon, but now that the war is over, they were no longer prepared to proceed on the basis of the 1943 Declaration, but wished to press for the grant to Ceylon of Dominion Status. ..."<sup>10</sup>

Senanayake explained to his colleagues in the Board of Ministers that: "The recommendations of the Soulbury Commission are without doubt an advance on the existing constitution, but they cannot satisfy us now. The Commissioners' terms of reference confined it to the 1943 Declaration but the conditions on which we Ministers were prepared to frame and work a constitution within that Declaration no longer exist ... the 1943 Declaration had been accepted ... as adequate only in respect of war conditions then prevailing, and the conditions had now changed; opinion in Ceylon had hardened in favour of Dominion Status"<sup>11</sup>.

In his discussions with Hall, he seized on the remaining obstacle to the attainment of Dominion Status by Ceylon: the limits on Ceylon's external sovereignty in regard to defence and external affairs laid down in the 1943 Declaration, and adhered to by both the Soulbury Commission and the Ministers themselves in their Draft Constitution of 1944. The restrictions in these spheres incorporated in the Ministers' Draft Constitution were elaborated upon in the Soulbury report in a manner which made them unworkable in practice, and this became one of the main arguments in Senanayake's case for the immediate grant of Dominion Status without the intermediate stage envisaged in the Soulbury report. Coupled with this was his most remarkable proposal: he urged that, if the legislation required to confer Dominion Status was likely to be time-consuming, the British Government could resort to an Order-in-Council for the purpose of granting self-government immediately, together with an agreement for the purpose of safeguarding the defence of the island and providing the same relations in external affairs as in the case of a Dominion. When he met Colonial Office officials on 7 and 10 September for a detailed review of the Soulbury<sup>12</sup>

9. Co 54/986, File 55541/5, "Secret", Cabinet Meeting 27 (45), 3 September 1945.

10. Co 54/986, File 55541/5, "Secret", Cabinet C (45) 3, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, subtitled "Ceylon Constitution", dated 12 October 1945. This document was prepared for the Cabinet Colonial Affairs Committee.

11. Senanayake's Report to the Board of Ministers, on his discussions with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 October 1945. A copy of this paper is available in the Bernard Aluvihara MSS at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

12. The Minutes of the discussions he had with Hall, and with the Colonial Office officials, are in Co 54/896, File 55541/5.

report, he produced a "comprehensive draft of a constitution...based on the fundamental assumption that, pending the conferment of Dominion status on Ceylon full self-government would be established by Order in Council subject to an agreement about Defence and External Affairs and the general relations between the United Kingdom and Ceylon..."<sup>13</sup>. His advisers prepared a draft of an Order in Council, and had it delivered to Hall on 12 September, together with an explanatory letter on the 14th.

What emerges from this is the most remarkable item of revision required by the new material released by the Public Record Office. The conferment of Dominion Status through an Order in Council, and the insistence on Agreements on Defence and External Affairs as a prior condition, were the most controversial features of the transfer of power in Sri Lanka, and a good deal of the controversy arose from the belief that these had been devised by the Colonial Office and imposed on Ceylon in 1947. In fact, these proposals first came from Senanayake in September 1945, were devised by his own advisers as a pragmatic solution to a complex problem, and the Colonial Office showed not the slightest interest in them when they were first proposed.

What, in the meantime, of the Labour government's response to the Soulbury proposals? On 11 September the Cabinet decided that they would accept the Soulbury report as the basis on which Ceylon's new constitution would be framed. But they were firmly opposed to the immediate grant of Dominion status. Hall conveyed the gist of these decisions to Senanayake on 17 September.

Senanayake returned home disappointed that his main objective had not been attained, but convinced that it would not take long for the island to achieve self-government. Both he and his adviser, A. G. (later Sir Arthur) Ranasingha, believed that they had succeeded in extracting an oral promise of Dominion Status from Hall, who had been overruled by the Cabinet<sup>14</sup>. They would have been surprised to learn that Hall was no more sympathetic to this proposal than his colleagues in the Cabinet. In a memorandum to the Cabinet Colonial Affairs Committee on 12 October, Hall explained that there could be no possibility of Ceylon reaching self-government before India or Burma, but, realizing that Senanayake's support was essential to get the Soulbury proposals approved by the State Council by as large a majority as possible, he was willing to

13. Senanayake's Report to the Board of Ministers, 9 October 1945.

14. A. G. Ranasingha, *Memories and Musings* (Colombo, 1972), pp. 187-232, see particularly p. 230. Sir Arthur confirmed this in much greater detail at an interview I had with him in early 1974.

make one concession : to review this question once more and to consider the possibility of granting a form of Dominion Status to Ceylon six years after the adoption of the new constitution, that is to say, around 1953-54. A similar promise had been made to Burma, and this Hall advanced as one more argument for a revision of the new constitution based on the Soulbury report after a period of six years.

This reference to a revision after six years was contained in the original draft of the British Government's White Paper on the Soulbury Constitution. It was eventually deleted by the Cabinet in the final version of the White Paper but not because they regarded it as too long a period: they felt it to be impolitic to lay down a specific period of time.<sup>15</sup> (The new Governor of the colony, Sir Henry Monck-Mason-Moore, understood the position perfectly when he explained that he "appreciated that His Majesty's Government may not be prepared to give Ceylon a blank cheque for self-government in six years time ...".)<sup>16</sup> Instead, at the suggestion of Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister, a reference was made to the evolutionary character of constitutional development. The people of Ceylon were assured that the British Government were in sympathy with their desire "to advance towards Dominion Status and they are anxious to co-operate with them to that end". They added, even more reassuringly: "It is, therefore, the hope of His Majesty's Government that the new constitution will be accepted by the people of Ceylon with a determination so to work it that in a comparatively short space of time such Dominion Status will be evolved. The actual length of time occupied by this evolutionary process must depend upon the experience gained under the new constitution by the people of Ceylon".<sup>17</sup>

Senanayake and the Board of Ministers welcomed the White Paper as a clarification of the British Government's attitude to the question of constitutional reform in Sri Lanka, and were relieved to find that, while there was to be no immediate grant of Dominion status, it was merely postponed pending the successful working of the new constitution. They would have been appalled to know that by "a comparatively short space of time" the British Cabinet meant "not less than six years", and that the British Prime Minister held the view that even if Ceylon "emerged successfully from the test", it could not be taken for granted that "she

15. Co 54/986, File 55541/5, Minutes of Cabinet Colonial Affairs Committee, 15 October, C (45); and Minutes of Cabinet meetings of 26 October (CM (45) 46), and 29 October (GEN 99/1st meeting).

16. Co 54/986, File 55541/5, Secret and Personal telegram from Monck-Mason-Moore to Hall, 17 October 1945.

17. Co 54/986, File 55541/5, Minutes of Cabinet meeting of 29 October.

would automatically attain full Dominion Status". This they did not know. As it was, the White Paper strengthened Senanayake's position to the point where the State Council on 8-9 November 1945 endorsed his motion for the acceptance of the White Paper on Constitutional Reform by an overwhelming majority of 51 votes to 3, far above the three-fourths majority which the British Government was reluctant to insist upon for fear that it could not be achieved.

In less than two years after this Senanayake's objective was achieved. In early 1947, with general elections to the new Parliament scheduled for August/September 1947, Senanayake pressed Whitehall for a more precise statement of policy on the attainment of Dominion Status. India's independence was announced by the British Cabinet on 20 February 1947, and with the partition of the Indian sub-continent into the states of India and Pakistan, and the grant of Independence to Burma, the way was clear for Dominion Status for Ceylon. Arthur Creech-Jones, Hall's successor at the Colonial Office, was much more receptive to the request for Dominion Status from Senanayake. The negotiations with Whitehall were handled by O. E. (later Sir Oliver) Goonetilleke on Senanayake's behalf.<sup>18</sup> At Whitehall, there was a clear understanding of the fact that Senanayake and the moderates were facing increasing pressure from left wing forces, apart from other critics, and that the immediate grant of Dominion Status was now an urgent necessity as a means of ensuring their political survival. In recognition of this fact, the British Government made the official announcement on 18th June, 1947 that Ceylon would receive "fully responsible status within the British Commonwealth of Nations". The formula adopted on this occasion was precisely the one proposed by Senanayake in September 1945 — an Order in Council, and Agreements on Defence and External Affairs.

This seemed to suggest a qualitative difference in the nature of the Independence that was being conferred on Sri Lanka—in comparison to the cognate process in India, Pakistan and Burma — when no meaningful difference in status was either intended by the British or accepted by Sri Lanka's leaders in the Board of Ministers prior to independence, and later, in the Cabinet. But if the political leadership in Sri Lanka took pride in the fact that the transfer of power was smooth and peaceful, they seemed oblivious to the political perils involved in making the process so bland as to be virtually imperceptible to those not directly involved. Above all, the Agreements on Defence and External Affairs

18. For these negotiations, see Sir Charles Jeffries, *O. E. G.: a biography of Sir Oliver Goonetilleke* (London, 1969), pp. 65-97. The Cabinet and Colonial Office papers on these negotiations had not been released at the time I wrote this paper.

appeared to give credibility to the argument that Sri Lanka's independence was flawed. The Agreements themselves were regarded as badges of inferiority, and checks on full sovereignty in external affairs; moreover, fears were expressed about secret clauses not divulged, or a secret treaty even more detrimental to the island's status as an independent nation. Events were to prove that these fears and suspicions were without foundations in fact, and certainly no secret undertaking had been given by Sri Lanka in 1947-48, but until 1956-57 suspicions on this score persisted,