

Many victimized workers joined the campaign trail during the 1947 elections. They actively supported left candidates. "The wounds of the strike have been healed but the scurs remain," as one leader reflected.

A strong contingent of the left parties was represented in the new parliament. Workers in the constituencies in the western seaboard and on the plantations had voted to elect 18 left MPs. A campaign for the reinstatement of victimised workers in the General Strike figured at the hustings. By the early 1950s workers were on the rise again. They cast off their passivity to

forgo vigorous trade unions. This resurgence was reflected in a shift to the left by the unions.

A makeshift memorial to Kandasamy was erected at the Albion Road roundabout at Dematagoda. But during the violent incidents in the mid-1950s the monument was demolished by communal miscreants.

In a reference to the 1947 incident at Dematagoda, Premier S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike said, "The shot that killed Kandasamy sounded the death knell of British Imperialism!" ■

T.P. Dematagoda was a 33-year-old, middle-class at the time of the 1947 general strike. From 1948 to 1967 he served as president of the C.S.S. He rose through the ranks to become an industrial relations officer (I.R.O.) before his retirement in 1981.

TSUNAMI

"The fountains of the great deep opened up" (Genesis, chapters 6-8)

It's a sunny morning
A new day.

Aftermath.

Kites soaring high in the air
with dazzling wings
borne on trapezes of eddying wind.

At our gate a young boy stands, smiling,
green trap net in his hand
to capture the rebel bird that has escaped
from our neighbour's pet shop

How long will its freedom last,
this leaf camouflaged budgerigar
nestling among the throuling epiphytes
that choke and strangle the rough barked
Bottle Brush tree nosing its torso and
branches with thick, twining lianas
of strong hemp-like ropes.

Will the smiling boy capture the bird?
Will it go back into its prison?
Will the babel of bird cries down the
Single note of piercing grief?

The bird climbs higher and higher,
its tiny wings carry it to the upper
franchas, hidden within the recessed shadows.
Disappears.

"It won't last long on its own,
predators will destroy it," the searchers say.
Frail, vulnerable bird its fate to us humans

unknown, our own instincts for survival,
blunted.

Frail bird, frail children, frail beings,
For some the yawning sea bed a revelation,
a gasp between life and death,
reminders of Israelite exodus when the wall of
waters submerged the dry land, the horses,
chariots, the horsemen, the Egyptian host
all living beings left dead upon the shore

For others, entangled in vast steel nets of
waves it was the hungry oceans abundant
catch, gorged on, ingested, sucked in,
swept away, beyond, beyond, beyond all retrieval

The subtle treason of poetry
deleudes our senses, colours, sound, movement:
circare endless metaphors for the sea,
now the azure wave clamps down
clutching with strong tearing talons
the tender flesh cleaving to life,
the strand slipping away
into the breathless seas.

Wiped of the face of creation,
a world of lost maps, lost islands
lost lives, lost minds, blot out existence.

Those who are left escape into a void of
nothingness, walk distraught on nowhere
roads to nowhere destinations,
bedlam echoes on our quiet shores and sanctuaries,
lost faces blur on vanishing horizons

each face tattered wrinkled flag,
pennants of defeat in nature's conquest,
limp bodies spangling the branches of
weeping trees.

pinned down, beneath the fallen walls
the mangled forms of children

Every pore, every crevice of the waking
consciousness overcome by odours of
putrefaction where once this tragic flesh
was warm, instinct with breath and life
Gigantic plumes of surf rise,
stun the air,

Waves swoop down to clutch
the writhing bodies so soon breath-quenched,
the winding sheets of waves are torn
apart, tattered limbs exposed to sun, to wind,

Now the long slow dinge begins,
the mourning of the bereaved waves
keen on and on,

spewed out upon the grooved sand
ridged with bodies, new furrows appear.

The air is alive with invisible ethereal
wings of hovering spirits weighing down
our leaden souls,
beneath our feet, the surf-edged
waves stampede, ride over a fissured land,

trees, branches, roots plucked up
with manic hands torn and twisted,
piled up the tumult of crushed debris.

Deep trenches close over mass graves
concealing limbs tangled with the
hopeless plunge of riven flesh,

blood seeps into soil,
what plants, what trees, orchards and
fields will grow to feed the pastured
kine and all this orphaned breed.

We alone are left
in this aftermath of Armageddon.

Our Mourning will not cease
In a surreal landscape
massed behind the skyline
lighting up the macabre darkness
the leaping fires of burning pyres,
wrecked boats, twisted rails, carriages
flung haphazardly, all awry,
with sundered bridges.
an eerie silence hangs its pal
over a voiceless night.

THE WAVE

This wave was not the perfect blue calligraphic
swirl of Hokusai's woodprint, each water-strand
throbbing with a force and energy all of its own
overpowering the peerless sky as it invaded the land,

there were no signs of buried wrecks,
no wrench of bodies torn asunder too puny
to grapple with the towering wall that
crushed the fallen bodies,
no lullabies from Whitman's cradles of the deep
and Paumanok's shores,

mountains of waves uprooted from quakes
and upheavals thrusting out to grasp and sweep away
each living being to unknown mysterious destinations,

bodies that will surface one day with their
messages like all those chance bottles thrown
into the sea, those silent voices scrolled on
parchment seeking out the solitary watcher
on the shore bearing portents and predictions
we ignore.

On the east coast they are burning the
bushes with bodies entangled in thorn trapped
twigs and splintered branches.

Piled up, dead fish, limp bodies, wrecked
boats, sculptures of desolation in landscapes
of timeless ruin.

Gone, all gone, the shells and corals
enticing children in play, gone, the scuttling land-crabs
with eggshell china shells, transparent, blue-white,
the algae and feathery sea weed trails, sea anemones,
mother-of-pearl shards, starfish, the flotsam
and jetsam that's flung on the shore
the castaways of the ocean.

Jean Arasanayagam