The Politics of Environmental Movements in Sri Lanka[1]

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The turbulent period of the 1980s in Sri Lanka is known best for the violence of July 1983 and the *bheeshanaya* that surrounded the second uprising of the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP) in 1988/89. While these events mark two defining moments in Sri Lankan society, they often overshadow other events and moments during this period which played a significant role in shaping Sri Lankan society and polity, although not as traumatic as previous events. The United National Party's (UNP) resounding victory in 1977 was followed by the introduction of a new constitution in 1978, along with the Executive Presidential system and a drastic shift in economic policy. These changes generated intense political and social mobilisation in response and led the state to take a repressive and authoritarian turn which set the tone for state-society relations in decades to come.

It was also a period of great ideological ferment; the introduction of a neoliberal economic regime (popularly known as the 'open economy') with a distinctly Sri Lankan flavour, the crisis in left movements (influenced both by local and global politics), the emergence of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* (nationalist consciousness) ideology, the drift of the JVP towards a hard-line Sinhala nationalist position, and the dominance of the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) in the North, generated vibrant debates in society and shaped emerging civil society initiatives and the political environment.

In this article, I intend to track the changing trajectories, fissures, and tensions within civil society organisations in the South by drawing on one of Sri Lanka's pioneering environmental movements, the Organisation to Safeguard Life and the Environment (OSLEN). My story, however, is not limited to the OSLEN; I also refer to the organisation known as *Janatha Mithuro* (JM) whose fortunes also influenced the OSLEN. The OSLEN and JM introduced 'green socialism' to social and political mobilisation in Sri Lanka; moreover, the formation of the JM shows the influence of Sinhala nationalist ideology in the formation of civil society in the South after the suppression of the second JVP insurrection and the splits it caused within civil society.

I draw on these two organisations to reflect on the politics of civil society formation in Sri Lanka. I am particularly interested in the different ideological orientations that influenced the formation and the dispersion of civil society during this period. Although many of the groups I discuss in this article had links with groups in the North and there were similar developments in the North and East, my focus here is limited to the emergence of movements in the South. It should also be noted that I am drawing on ongoing research for this article – hence the ideas and thoughts that I discuss here are rather tentative and speculative at this stage.[1]

Political and Economic Conditions

The 1980s were a period of change for many reasons: apart from the significant political and economic changes that were taking place or *because* of these changes, there were shifts in how people and movements were organised around the issues they were confronting. In the 1977 General Election, the electoral damage to traditional left political parties (the 'old' left) created the space for new political and social formations and mobilisations to emerge. The political climate of the time also demanded new and alternative ways of organising and mobilising. The trade unions were almost demolished by the government after the 1980 July Strike, leaving thousands without work

and in need of support. Emergency Regulations were imposed; the opposition was in disarray as the former Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, was stripped of her civic rights, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was in place. The government was cracking down on any form of dissent. The effects of a ruthless and authoritarian regime were being experienced by opposition political parties, trade unions, political and social activists throughout the country. These conditions meant that political activists needed to regroup, rethink and reorganise to respond.

The military conflict in the North East was also escalating, and the state had dispatched the military to the North to crush the revolt as soon as possible. The JVP, no longer underground, was regrouping in the South. Universities were in a ferment, agitating against the White Paper on education and the attempt to establish a private university of Medicine. Student Unions were banned in universities; so were organisations affiliated to any party or movement outside universities. Student leaders had set up 'Student Action Committees' in almost all the universities to bypass these bans on mobilising. Universities were viewed as hotbeds of extremism and radical political activity; the JVP was a particularly active presence in the universities, and the government viewed student activism as directly linked to dissent against the state (Parliamentary Series No 107, 1987).

Significant changes were also taking place on the economic front: Sri Lanka was one of the first countries in this part of the world to 'open' its economy. Famously, President J. R. Jayewardene had stated 'let the robber barons come' in an open invitation to investors of all shades and colours to invest in the country. As part of liberalisation policies were being implemented in various areas, education and health sectors were gradually opening up to the private sector. But this was not a textbook version of the neoliberal economic policy; the state was still in firm control of some of the country's largest development projects such as the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project. This ostensible 'neoliberal' turn also saw an expansion of public sector employment and state-controlled media, including the Independent Television Network. Flagship projects of the regime such as the Mahapola Scholarship Scheme, the Million Housing Project (later *Janasaviya*), and the World Bank-supported poverty alleviation scheme were all state-led development projects. Interestingly, these projects were indelibly linked with powerful politicians from the ruling party for whom state development and the performances associated with development became a path of consolidating power within their party and in national politics (Tennakoon 1988).

Ideological Diversity

The changes that were taking place gave rise to an equally vibrant and active opposition. Crucially however, the opposition was not from within the traditional political parties. As mentioned previously, the 'Old Left', the *Lanka Sama Samaja Party* (LSSP) and the Communist Party (CP) were in decline. The trade union movements that had been for so long the basis for organised protest were also in decline.[2] This meant that, in a way, the space for political organising became more open. While organisations were being formed, people were being mobilised around a range of concerns such as women's issues, peace, human rights, democracy, land rights, and the environment (Uyangoda 1999, 2001).

An interesting feature of this period was the number of organisations/movements that emerged and the connections and rivalries between them. Despite the heavy-handed presence of the state and the government's suspicion and suppression of all forms of opposition, the issues discussed above generated resistance. For example, the government's attempts to liberalise education were met with heavy resistance from student groups. Leasing out land to multi-national companies for large scale sugar farming in the Moneragela district led to wide-scale protests from farmers in the area. The PTA and the imposition of Emergency also generated criticism and protests. However, while the anti-government sentiment was increasing, the violence perpetrated by the JVP in the South against those they considered 'traitors', including members of other left parties and the LTTE's elimination of militant and progressive Tamil groups, threw those who identified themselves with progressive politics into a quandary; they became the target of both the state and groups such as the JVP in the South and/or the LTTE in the North and East.

Crucial to this period was also the influence of certain individuals with personal charisma in the formation of fresh movements and organisations and how some of these movements created space (physical and intellectual) to bring together different individuals and organisations. The radical Christian influence on political organising during this period and also for creating such common spaces cannot be overlooked. Father Yohan Devananda founded *Devasarana* in Kurunegala,[3] similarly, Father Paul Caspersz, a Jesuit,

set up *Satyodaya*, a movement working for the rights of plantation workers, and the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality. Father Tissa Balasuriya, a radical Catholic, founded the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR). The Student Christian Movement (SCM) became a space where many young people of different Christian denominations were initiated into political consciousness-raising and learning the art of organising and protesting (Amarasuriya 2017). Liberation theology, Marxism, revolutionary politics were the main ideological influences of these groups.

Another ideological influence during this period was the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement. The *Jathika Chinthanaya* attracted several university students, particularly those from the disciplines of Science, Engineering, and Technology into its folds. Its eventual emergence as the main ideological basis for Sinhala nationalist politics has, in some ways, drawn attention away from the fact that *Jathika Chinthanaya*, certainly in its early days, became popular for its critique of Western philosophy, including Marxism. This generated many debates between intellectuals and activist groups. Part of the story of environmental movements in Sri Lanka shows how those debates influenced their evolution as organisations. Indeed, those debates would eventually divide organisations and civil society along seemingly irreconcilable lines. But first, let us turn into a brief description of *Jathika Chinthanya* itself.

Jathika Chinthanya

For many liberal intellectuals and activists, the term *Jathika Chinthanaya* and the names of Nalin de Silva and Gunadasa Amarasekera, the main ideologues of the group, conjure visions of hard-line Sinhala nationalism of a particularly toxic kind, best left alone. Unfortunately, this has also meant that our understanding of this ideology, especially its influence on Sinhala-speaking intellectuals and political activists often lacks nuance and does not adequately capture the complexities of Sinhala nationalism.

Gunadasa Amarasekera, a Sinhala language writer, had for some time been writing along the well-worn path of Sinhala novelists, in search of an 'authentic' Sinhala Buddhist identity. Nalin de Silva, a physicist by training, was an academic attached to the Department of Mathematics, in the Faculty of Science, University of Colombo. While Amarasekera's early writing tried to combine Marxism with Sinhala nationalism, De Silva's rejected Marxism as part of the Judeo-Christian ideological tradition that he was critiquing (Nanayakkara 2003). De Silva, had been a member of the LSSP and then later one of its offshoots, the *Nava Sama Samaja Party* (NSSP); but his critique of Marxism and his disputes with the other members of the NSSP eventually led to his estrangement from the party. A group known as *Gaveshakayo*, comprising a small group of students (mainly from the Science Faculty of the University of Colombo) led by Nalin de Silva, began a series of discussions and lectures during the 1980s. These early discussions focussed primarily on the limitations of a Eurocentric philosophy in apprehending reality and instead proposed an alternative philosophy drawing from Buddhist, Hindu, and Chinese traditions (de Silva 1992; Witharana 2002; Rambukwella 2018).

These discussions attracted many young Sinhala-speaking university students and activists, some who felt alienated from the elite, English-speaking civil society circles active at the time. Also, the young intellectuals drawn to this ideology were disillusioned with the Marxism of the 'Old Left' as well as of the JVP, which would have 'traditionally' been their more natural political home. Some of those who became part of this group had been active in student politics opposed to the JVP-led student politics. Some had been part of the JVP student movement but had moved away from it, as it became more repressive. As one of the university student groups operating at the time, members of *Gaveshakayo* were part of the debates and discussions taking place among university students at the time. There were debates between the *Gaveshakayo* group and other student groups, especially on the philosophy of science. Nalin de Silva's main thesis put forward in his book, *Mage Lokaya*, proposed a 'four-way logic' based on Buddhist philosophy to understand the reality that he argued was more sophisticated than Western philosophy. This created quite a stir among the politically conscious student groups at the time. For example, Champika Ranawaka, an Engineering student from the University of Moratuwa turned politician, responded to this by introducing a framework that argued going beyond the 'four-way logic' advocated by de Silva (Witharana 2002).

What is important, however, is the space provided by the *Jathika Chinthanaya* and *Gaveshakayo* for a group of young Sinhala-speaking intellectuals to meet, discuss, and mobilise around contemporary political issues. It is also important to note that at the beginning, the Sinhala nationalist or the anti-minority stance with which those affiliated with the ideology of *Jathika Chinthanaya* are now associated was not pre-eminent. Rather, the focus

was on critiquing the dominance of Western philosophy and the search for an alternative philosophical position that could offer a critique of the failure of modernity. The ease with which this position drifted towards a hard-line Sinhala nationalist position, and the degree to which this drift towards nationalism is linked to the complete rejection and marginalisation of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* group from 'liberal' civil society, is a point of conjecture. Suffice to say that a close analysis of the formation, separations, and tensions within social and political movements during that time reveals that personal animosities, friendships, and fragile egos influenced movement and organisation-building as much as ideological differences.

The Organisation to Safeguard of Life and the Environment (OSLEN)

The OSLEN brought together a remarkably diverse group of individuals in its original formation. The first convenor, Raja Wijethunga, was part of the 1971 JVP insurrection and then after leaving the JVP, a regular participant in the activities at *Devasarana.* Wijethunga was also influenced by the protests against multi-national companies in Monaragala. One of the first activities organised by the OSLEN was on the Bhopal tragedy in India. It organised a series of meetings and discussions denouncing the position of the Indian government and Union Carbide. A statement and letter drafted by the OSLEN addressed to Rajiv Gandhi in 1985, includes the signatures of all the major trade unionists in the country; Sarath Fernando for *Devasarana,* Father Tissa Balasuriya on behalf of the Centre for Society and Religion, Ainsley Samarajeewa, on behalf the Christian Peace Conference, Wimal Fernando representing the Movement for Defence of Democratic Rights, K.L. Dharmasiri representing the Independent Students Union and G.W. Adams representing the Student's Action Committee of the University of Moratuwa. The signatories on behalf of the OSLEN were Rev Badagiriya Medananda, Rev. Kenneth Fernando, Prof. Carlo Fonseka, Prof. Colvin Gunaratna, Prof. Kumari Jayawardena, Advocate Prins Rajasooriya, Dr. Osmund Jayaratne, Dr. Joel Fernando, Dr. Sunil Rathnapriya and Dr. Raja Wijethunga. Additionally, the OSLEN served as a meeting place for prominent political activists and even served as a refuge for those who were in hiding during this period. Like *Devasarana* in Kurunegela, the OSLEN was a place of shelter and protection in Colombo, for those who were the target of JVP violence.

What is clear from this list of names is that the OSLEN, during the mid-1980s, could bring together prominent organisations, trade unions, academics, and civil society activists of the time. The tone of the letter and the statement issued concerning the Bhopal tragedy highlights the actions of multi-national companies (in this instance, Union Carbide), the complicity of the Indian government in covering up the lapses of the Union Carbide and the neglect of the issues, and concerns and effects of the tragedy on people. The statement was highly critical of the use of toxic chemicals for various purposes, disregarding its impact on people and how Union Carbide attempted to evade responsibility for the disaster. Its main thrust focused on the way in which multi-national companies cause havoc on the lives and health of the public, aided and abetted by governments intent on pleasing investors and pursuing economic growth at any cost.

Unfortunately, following the eventual winding up of the OSLEN, primarily because of internal conflicts (see below), many of the documents relating to their work are either missing or scattered among various individuals. For example, one of the major initiatives of the OSLEN was the establishment of a Public Commission of Inquiry on Environmental Issues. Prominent academics and civil society activists, including Prof. Carlo Fonseka and Prof H. Sriyananda were appointed as judges to this Commission. They held public hearings in various parts of the country. However, these documents cannot be located at present.

During the latter part of the 1980s, and particularly after 1990, young activists active in university politics at the time also joined the OSLEN. Many of the university students associated with the OSLEN, particularly from the University of Moratuwa and Colombo, had been active student leaders and those who had been mobilised against the JVP. One of the most prominent figures was Asoka Abeygunawardene, a student leader of the University of Moratuwa. He served for a period as the Chairman of the Strategic Enterprise Management Authority (SEMA) of the Presidential Secretariat under President Maithripala Sirisena, working closely with Rev Athuraliye Rathana. According to Raja Wijetunga, Abeygunawardene played an important role in improving the organisation of monthly discussion groups on environmental and energy issues and bringing the young generation of activists to the OSLEN. These discussions were well attended and included senior academics from the university sector, as well as prominent civil society activists.

The OSLEN also published a paper named *Haritha* (Green). With the involvement of the young generation of activists, many from a Science and Technology background, the OSLEN's green socialist agenda was reinforced. Perhaps because of the Science and Technology background of some of those involved in the OSLEN, there was an interest in renewable energy generation and putting forward an alternative argument to the government's energy generation plans. Hence, a lot of OSLEN's work was focussed on mobilising against and critiquing the government's energy policy.

The OSLEN campaigned against the proposed coal power plants in Trincomalee and Mawella and the large-scale Kukuleganga hydropower project which would have potentially inundated parts of the Sinharaja forest. Whether directly because of the OSLEN campaigns or not, the proposed coal power plants in Trincomalee and Mawella were abandoned and the Kukuleganga hydropower project was scaled down considerably. The OSLEN also produced a report on the breach of the Kantale Dam in 1986, which had led to the death of many villagers and the destruction of thousands of acres of paddy land (Azeez 2011). Along with other groups, the OSLEN was also part of the protest campaigns against the Kandalama Hotel project in 1992 (Samath 1992).

After the brutal crackdown and eventual defeat of the JVP insurrection, individuals and groups that had to lie low due because they were targets of the JVP could move around freely. It also left a vacuum for political activism. One group that developed during this time was the *Janatha Mithuro* (JM). Champika Ranawaka and Rev. Athuraliye Rathana, a student leader of the University of Peradeniya, were closely involved with the JM; so were Bandula Chandrasekera, Malinda Seneviratne, Gevindu Kumaratunga, Karunaratne Paranavithana and Dhammika Alahakoon (Seneviratne 2012; 2013). Many of them were university students who opposed the politics of the JVP and UNP and had roots in the 'old left' parties but were influenced by the critique of Marxism offered by the *Jathika Chinthanaya.*

Asoka Abeygunawardene was also associated with the JM, which was one reason for the emerging conflict between him and the OSLEN. Abeygunawardene's growing association with those of the *Jathika Chinthanaya* movement was not to the liking of some others at the OSLEN. One of the major points of contention was the gradually developing of a difference of opinion between the groups on the 'national question'. Initially, those who were in the environmental movement held the position that war was anti-environmental as it destroyed human life and the natural environment. Consequently, the position of the OSLEN, in particular, had been sympathetic to the problems of the minority communities and was supportive of power devolution as a political solution for the problems of minorities. In fact, Champika Ranwaka's early writing accepts the diversity of culture and nations and the right to self-determination of every 'national consciousness'. As those who valued 'life' in all its diverse forms, it was argued that environmentalists, by definition, should be anti-war (Ranawaka 1993; Witharana 2002). However, the JM began eventually to take a relatively different position. That position argued that in the face of the growing dominance of the LTTE and its elimination of the more progressive Tamil militant groups, the LTTE had to be defeated militarily–that this was a pre-condition to restoring the rapidly shrinking democratic space in the North and East as well as in the South, or indeed, addressing the grievances of minority communities. Members of the JM argued that defeating the LTTE also required an ideological defence of the grievances of the Sinhala Buddhist community. This was a position that Nalin de Silva and the *Gaveshakayo* group were also advocating by formulating an ideological defence of Sinhala nationalism, questioning some fundamental formulations of the 'national question' and advocating a military solution to the ethnic problem. Nalin de Silva's writings were direct engagements with these issues. This ideology influenced the formation of the group, the National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT), towards which the members of the JM, *Gaveshakayo,* and *Jathika Chinthanaya* gravitated. When most left-leaning and liberal civil society organisations took a critical stance against the Sinhala Buddhist ideology, this development within Sinhala nationalists particularly about the idea of a distinct Sinhala Buddhist culture that had a higher or older claim on the island's heritage created a sharp divide between the two groups. It also meant two widely different positions on war: while one group advocated for extensive devolution and a political solution, the other stood firmly behind the military option and resisted any form of power devolution.

This ideological clash was one of the major reasons for the eventual demise of the OSLEN. Ideological differences turned personal and petty. Ugly accusations of financial fraud were made against each other, and prominent donors such as the Dutch donor HIVOS withdrew funding from the OSLEN. The older generation of people associated with the OSLEN drifted

away; for example, Raja Wijethunga was removed as its Convenor. Those who were associated with the OSLEN in its last stages of operation eventually formed an organisation known as the Green Movement of Sri Lanka (GMSL), a collective of various small environmental groups. The GMSL was also perceived by progressive and liberal civil society organisations as Sinhala nationalist, primarily because of its links to individuals such as Champika Ranawaka, which it also tried to downplay at least in public (Personal Communication with Balasingham Skanthakumar, August 21, 2017).

The *Sihala Urumaya* and later, J*athika Hela Urumaya* (JHU) were the political parties that emerged from the JM and NMAT. However, it must also be noted that there was no linear or direct connection between the JM, NMAT, *Sihala Urumaya*, and JHU. Champika Ranawaka, Rev Athuraliye Rathana, and Asoka Abeygunawardene featured in all three, as did some others, but there were also those who moved in and out of these different groups at various points and it was simply not the case that one group morphed seamlessly into another group. There was also no unanimity among members regarding strategy directions. For example, some members of the JM were critical of the decision of the JHU to contest elections.

It is also worth mentioning that somewhere along the way, there was a shift in civil society; rather than public mobilisation on issues, there was more focus on advocacy with the political class. Perhaps, the mobilisation of all the different groups active at the time (including JM) to support Chandrika Kumaratunga, especially in the 1994 Presidential election had something to do with this shift. Kumaratunga's victory created opportunities for those who worked with her to enter government bodies and institutions, blurring the boundaries between civil society and the state. However, groups such as the NMAT remained outside the new 'circles of power' (Wickramasinghe 2001) and eventually organised themselves politically as a distinct force, in the shape of the *Sihala Urumaya* and eventually, the JHU. Although the *Sihala Urumaya* and JHU were never numerically powerful, their ideological influence on mainstream politics as well as on social and political movements is significant.

The defeat of the LTTE in 2009, produced yet another shift: if the argument for sustaining pro-war rhetoric was defeating the LTTE, then the end of the war once again led to a reorganisation of alliances. Today, Champika Ranawaka is in alliance with the United National Party (UNP) or a recent breakaway from the UNP, the *Samagi Jana Balawegaya* led by Sajith Premadasa, the son of Ranasinghe Premadasa, his arch-enemy in the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, Rev Athuraliye Rathana and Asoka Abeygunawardene worked closely with President Maithripala Sirisena of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The *Jathika Chinthanaya* advocates, on the other hand, are strong supporters of the Mahinda Rajapakse faction of the SLFP, but reportedly, Nalin de Silva has been critical of Mahinda Rajapakse in his recent writings (Personal Communication with Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, May 10th, 2017). Gevindu Kumaratunga, who has become one of the leading spokespersons for Sinhala nationalism, is a firm supporter of the new political party of Mahinda Rajapakse, the *Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna* (SLPP) (Bandara 2018).

Conclusion

As a 'work in progress', my conclusions are rather tentative and speculative. This brief description of environmental movements during a particularly charged political moment in Sri Lanka's history is, in my view, reflective of the complex alliances, networks, ideological influences, and inspirations that characterised civil society mobilising during that period. This period of civil society activism was marked less by institutional affiliation and institution building, and more by a combustible mix of ideological and personal alliances and rivalries.

The focus on the personal also meant that relationships were intense, yet fraught. The boundaries between organisations were porous. Organisations were spaces that were used for various purposes; as places of safety, meeting places, and sites of debate and dialogue. This porous characteristic in organisations meant that people and groups wove in and out of various organisations and spaces quite freely.

At times, this meant that ideologically different camps could also occupy, at least temporarily, the same spaces. For example, representatives of the JVP, as well as the EPRLF, met at MIRJE in its early years; the MDDR brought together 1971 JVPers, the SLFP, breakaway groups from the CP, the LSSP, as well as new left groups such as the NSSP and *Mahajana Pakshaya*. Nalin de Silva attended workshops at the SSA and cultural programmes organised by the MIRJE. *Devasarana* provided refuge for different groups and space for meetings and discussions. Similarly, the OSLEN was as

much a refuge, space for people to meet, discuss, and organise as it was a movement promoting environmental rights. Conversation, dialogue, and debate were the order of the day: most of the organisations had discussion forums, newsletters, and magazines where issues were vigorously debated and argued. As to when positions in civil society became more polarised and distinct, developing in isolation from each other and more antagonistic to the point of intolerance, needs to be explored closely in relation to why they did so and the implications of this shift for civil society space in Sri Lanka.

One consequence of this polarisation, in my view, is the loss of nuance and complexity in our collective understanding of some critical issues of our time: particularly nationalism and class politics. As is evident, in the rise and fall of the OSLEN, for example, many factors played a part; and among these, the difficulties faced by progressive movements in the South in dealing with the rising violence of the LTTE is notable. The growing dominance of the rights perspective in the work of civil society, narrowly framed in terms of civil and political rights, meant that mobilising and organising became more focussed on upward channels of authority and accountability to the state and international community, rather than towards communities affected directly. This also meant a closer relationship and dependency between liberal civil society and 'friendly' regimes as exemplified in 1994, 2004, and 2015. The fall of those regimes or their loss of popularity affected the legitimacy as well as the functioning of civil society organisations closely associated with those regimes. In the meantime, this also meant that consciousness building and political organising of the Southern constituency became the sole prerogative of Sinhala nationalist groups, which were outside those accepted circles.

What we have seen in the last few years is the dependence of civil society on the patronage of the ruling regime for advocacy and influence. Each change of regime is associated with the rising influence of particular civil society groups and the decline of another group of civil society, distinguishing between civil society and political parties almost indistinguishable. Conventional understandings of civil society, therefore, as occupying a space between the government and people no longer make any sense. Civil society quite clearly depends on political goodwill for its survival. At the same time, the polarisation within civil society reflects the polarisation between political parties. As I have discussed here, this was not obvious in the 1980s and 1990s despite the vigorous debates within civil society and the political violence of the time. Arguably, despite the violence, civil society space during this period was much more diverse and less intolerant than what we experience today.

Notes

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2 However, it must be noted that despite the general decline in trade union activity, during this period, there was considerable trade union activity in the newly established Free Trade Zones, particularly in women's groups. In fact, one of the few trade union successes during that point was organised by women workers in the FTZ: the Polytex Garments strike in 1982 (Samuels 2006; Amarasuriya 2018).

3 *Devasarana* or *Devasaranaramaya* was set up in 1957 but played a crucial role in supporting the activities of many civil society movements during this period. Sarath Fernando, a former JVP member and activist was in charge of *Devasarana* at this time (Amarasuriya 2017).

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