

There is an intense debate in Sri Lanka at present about the nature of the post-civil war state. Federalism has entered the official political discourse. We reproduce below the full text of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's famous "Federalist Speech" delivered in Jaffna on July 17, 1926, which appeared in The Ceylon Morning Leader.

FEDERATION AS THE ONLY SOLUTION TO OUR POLITICAL PROBLEMS

S.W.R. Dias Bandaranaike

Under the auspices of the Students' Congress Mr. S.W.R.Dias Bandaranaike, B.A. (Oxon), Barrister-at-law, delivered a very interesting lecture on "Federation as the only Solution to our Political Problems." Dr Isaac Thambyah presided.

Mr. Bandaranaike said that it was necessary in the first place to realize the importance of the present time. A revision of the constitution was due in 1928. A satisfactory measure of self-government was therefore expected. It was therefore necessary to think very clearly and realize in its entirety the whole political question. A false step taken, a false proposal made now would be very difficult to retrieve in the future. They all wanted self-government. The question remained what was the measure of self-government they were aiming at.

There were briefly two forms of Government met within Ceylon. One form was the 'Nindagama' system of land tenure, the other was the Headmen system of provincial administration. The Nindagama system was a feudal form of Government. As long as the feudal dues were paid (they were always paid in hand) no notice was taken of anything else. In the Headmen system, the village was considered as the unit. The King had his various Disawas, Rate Mahatmayas, etc. The various provinces were divided and subdivided till one came to the Gansabawa. The Gansabawas was composed of the head of each family of all those in the village irrespective of wealth. The litigants had the right to appeal to the King himself but the Gansabawas' decision was rarely upset. All that meant that the whole land was a loose federation bound by one common oath to the King. When the British came to the island they introduced a centralized form of Government. That centralized form of government as introduced had a semblance of a free institution. Even to the present day it was nothing else but a bureaucratic form of Government.

The lecturer then referred to the course of political agitation for larger measure of reforms. It did not start till 1915 when the riots

took place. The lecturer then referred to the great part played by Sir P. Ramanathan then the Educated Ceylonese Member. Sir P. Arunachalam started the national Congress. It was he who fathered the movement for agitation for reform. When the Congress was started the articles which all the members subscribed themselves was that their aim and goal should be self Government within the Empire. Beyond the securing of a few more seats in the Legislative Council nothing else was done. Those who agitated for reform concentrated their whole energies on arguing in two directions on fallacious bases. The system was not questioned as to its suitability secondly they aimed at copying the type of Government as existing in England. The result was that the Legislative Council at present. They were Government Members who were not responsible to any body of voters. The territorial principle was acknowledged, the communal principle acquiesced and when all was said and done the assembly had no real power. The Legislative Council had a certain measure of control over the finances, but that did not amount to much. The Executive Council was divorced from the Legislative Council looked like a School Boys Debating Society. That was the net result of the agitation of the last few years. The price paid for it was the Sinhalese Tamil Split and the Low Country and Kandyan Sinhalese split. The minorities, looked with mistrust one at the other. It was wrong to think that the differences were not fundamental. There were men who thought that the difference were created by a few ambitious persons and when those persons died the differences would disappear. A hundred years ago there were no such differences. They did not appear because the Englishman sat on the heads of the Tamil, the Low-Country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese.

The moment they began to speak of taking the Government in their hands, then the differences that were lying dormant smouldered forth. If they considered past history they would see that the three communities, the Tamils, the Low-Country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese had lived or over a thousand years in Ceylon and had not shown any tendency to merge. They preserved their language, their customs, their religion. He would be very rash

man who would pin his faith on the gradual disappearance of those differences.

The lecturer then proceeded to outline the difficulties that would crop up. The Legislative Council would under the anticipated reform Government, elect their Prime Minister and the various Ministers. Now there was a certain proportion of members to represent the various communities. If that proportion was maintained, in the ministry too the communities would demand a certain proportion.

A centralized form of Government assumed a homogenous whole. He knew no part of the world where a Government was carried on under such conflicting circumstances as would be experienced in Ceylon.

Those would be the troubles if a centralised form of Government was introduced into countries with large communal differences.

In a Federal Government, each federal unit had complete power over themselves. Yet they united and had one or two assemblies to discuss matters affecting the whole country. That was the form of government in the United States of America. All the self-Governing dominions, Australia, South Africa, Canada had the same system. Switzerland afforded a better example for Ceylon. It was a small country, but three races lived there. French, Germans and Italians. Yet Switzerland was a country where the federal form of Government was very successful. Each canton managed its own affairs. But questions of the foreign affairs, commerce, defence etc., matters about which differences and controversies would be at a minimum were dealt with by the Federal Assembly. In Ceylon each Province should have complete autonomy. There should be one or two assemblies to deal with the special revenue of the island. A thousand and one objections could be raised against the system but when the objections were dissipated, he was convinced that some form of federal Government would be the only solution. He had not dealt with the smaller communities. For such communities temporary arrangements could be made for special representation. Those temporary arrangements would exist till the fear existed about one community trying to overlord the other. He would suggest the same for the Colombo Tamil seat. The three main divisions in the island were the Kandyan Sinhalese, the Low country Sinhalese and the Tamils. It was difficult to find a system that would completely satisfy everyone. That was in brief the Federal System. He would be satisfied if it was recognized that the problem did exist. If there were a better form of plan, he hoped someone would think about it and place it before the people.

A lively discussion ensued. The following is a brief account of the points raised.

Mr. J.K. Chanmugam did not understand how the Federal system worked in early days of Ceylon History. He did not understand how the system outlined would be worked satisfactorily especially when feelings of a wrong type were uppermost in many minds. He

instanced the way in which Sir P. Arunachalam was treated in the endeavours to come forward for the Colombo seat and also the way in which Sir Ramanathan was treated in the election of the vice-President to the Legislative Council.

Mr. Subiah said that even in the Federal assembly differences would arise.

Mr. Julius Philips said that the Federal system would be alright in provinces where one race was overwhelmingly large. How was the Western Province to deal with?

Mr. J.H.P. Wijeyaratnam instanced the difficulty of some provinces being unable to carry on the work of administration due to lack of revenue.

Mr. C. Philips wished to know how the questions of religion and caste were to be solved. Those two questions seemed to be acute, at least in North Ceylon. If there were disputes among the three big communities who was to settle them. Judging from numbers, the Low-country Sinhalese would have an easy walkover.

Mr. R. Subramaniam said that small communities should not be neglected.

Mr. Bailie Mylvaganam said that under all these circumstances it was safe to be under the British.

Mr. Bandaranaike in reply said that the question of religion was hardly a matter to be dealt with by legislations. The question of financial inequality was serious objection, so also was the question of education. The common fund could be shared among provinces that required help. The subject was full of controversy. The last speaker had hit the nail on the head. Why not remain under the British? Why all that worry and discussion? No nation deserved the name of a nation if it did not want a measure of self-Government. It deserved to be wiped out the surface of the earth.

Dr Isaac Thambayah said that the lecture was powerfully delivered and reasonably thought out. He hoped that a great deal of interest would be created. The British Malaya was the only place he knew where Federation was in working and working well too. He suggested that their leaders of thought in Jaffna and Colombo should pay a visit to Malaya and come back and tell them what they thought of Federation. In conclusion Dr Thambayah congratulated the students' Congress for its choice of lectures. Sometime ago a gentleman spoke of the ideals of education. That night Mr. Bandaranaike had spoken of the ideals of Government. He moved a vote of thanks to the lecturer. The vote was carried with acclamation. — Jaffna Cor. ■