

OSMUND JAYARATNE (1924-2006): SCIENTIFIC AND POLITICAL VISIONARY

The death of LSSP politician, physicist and writer Osmund Jayaratne in September 2006 was mourned by the many who knew him in his various capacities. He is missed by those with SSA who came to know him recently through working with him on his memoirs, as we extend our deep condolences to his wife Joyce and family.

For the past several years, we visited Osmund and Joyce at their home in Kandana regarding the compilation and editing of his memoirs. This culminated in the launch of the book on his 80th birthday, in October 2004, and the rousing speech he made to the packed N.M. Perera hall. It was a working relationship that continued, with Osmund Jayaratne regularly contributing engaging and educative science articles for *Polity*. Osmund could not have written his memoirs or articles without the support of Joyce, who during his last years living with his visual disability, never left his side. Those with SSA who worked with Osmund and Joyce, and came to know this legendary figure, who was physicist, dramatist, leading LSSP activist, local council politician, university professor, reformer and vice-chancellor – appreciated the chance to contribute to the publishing of his memoirs and last writings.

No one could forget the genuine warmth of Osmund's welcoming smile and sincere words, and the inspiration that he provided over to so many people over so many years. As Kamini Meedeniya, who knew him from university days, emphasized: "Osmund was an excellent teacher; he made any subject he taught come alive, whether in physics or politics. He was passionate about whatever he did. That is why his students, whether here or working now at NASA or as professors in universities abroad, supported him in his most difficult days."

Osmund Jayaratne, even after losing his sight, still held strong to a powerful vision for people here and throughout the world, best captured in his own words, from the closing lines of his book, under the heading "A Renewed Vision." Much of the tragic trajectory he professed four years ago, in light of the

ensuing Iraq war and the tsunami, seemed prophetic – as more hopefully still would be his ultimate vision for humanity. As he wrote:

"Through BBC and CNN I am fairly aware at the moment of the tragic events in the world: nation fighting against nation; massacres occurring in many of the countries of the Third World. The Arab nations, particularly those of Palestine, are subject to the cruellest attacks by the well-armed State of Israel. Blood is flowing along the streets and human life has become cheap in the poorer countries of the world, and above all this stands the monstrosity of US imperialism seeking to impose its will upon all the countries of the world..."

In addition to these man-made disasters, natural tragedies have also begun to affect the world. Floods and drought, earthquakes and violence, eruptions and disasters in the transport sector are killing thousands upon thousands of the peoples of the world. The grossest corruption seems to have overtaken the capitalist corporations in the USA. The world is undergoing an unprecedented economic crisis, in fact a severe depression that is euphemistically referred to as a 'recession.' States are collapsing everywhere, markets are dwindling, and the world is undergoing a crisis that, in my opinion, is even worse than the Depression of 1924-25 and the 1930s of the last century.

"Yet, at the risk of being labelled an incurable optimist, I still believe that the world cannot proceed in this manner for very long. In the decades to come, long after my own generation has passed away, imperialism and capitalism will inevitably reach its destined end predicted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels 150 years ago. A socialist society must inevitably arise, and the human race will for once come into its own.

(Osmund Jayaratne, *Politics, Science, Academe: Memoirs*: p160-61) ■

Book editor, May Yee; Osmund Jayaratne's memoirs were compiled and edited by the Social Scientists' Association. The book is available at the SSA's Suriya Bookshop.