

THE CEYLON NATIONAL CONGRESS IN DISARRAY II: THE TRIUMPH OF SIR WILLIAM MANNING, 1921-1924*

K. M. DE SILVA

Arunachalam's departure from the Ceylon National Congress was the climacteric event in the disarray in that organization which became evident in the latter half of 1921. Without Arunachalam the Congress could hardly sustain its claim to the status of a national political organization, and with the emergence of the Tamil Mahajana Sabha the Congress had lost its right to speak on behalf of all communities in the island, for the Tamils were now clearly alienated. It is at this point that Ramanathan emerged as one of the central—and most controversial figures—in the island's politics in the years 1922-24.

The careers of Arunachalam and Ramanathan afford a study in contrasts as regards their aspirations for the people of this country: Arunachalam was the advocate of constructive co-operation between the Sinhalese and Tamils as associates in the building up (and eventually in the government) of a multi-racial polity; Ramanathan emphasised the virtues of a separate identity for the Tamils, of a Tamil nationalism to be fostered in collaboration with the British, and if necessary in opposition to Sinhala nationalism. Arunachalam's achievements were much the more remarkable, if not the more significant, of the two. He stood for harmonious association between the Sinhalese and Tamils in nationalist politics, and nation building, for mutual trust and responsive co-ordination of sectional interests in the struggle for a common goal of *swaraj*. But if his achievements were noteworthy and distinguished, they were also singular and unusual, for he attained a towering pre-eminence in national political leadership (a pre-eminence which was ungrudgingly acknowledged by Sinhalese leaders themselves) on the basis of his talents, achievements and merits. Ironically, however, this distinction was possible largely because of the elitist political structure of the reform and nationalist movements. He was the advocate of radicalism and democratisation, the twin political processes which would eventually guarantee the permanent Sinhalese domina-

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tion of the politics of the island, when talent, achievement and merit by themselves would be inadequate to reach the pinnacle of political leadership if one happened to be a Tamil. Besides, Arunachalam's eventual disenchantment with the Congress served to underline the fact that for many Sinhalese responsive co-operation between the Sinhalese and Tamils pre-supposed the acceptance by the Tamils of an essentially subordinate position by virtue merely of their numerical inferiority, and that their status in a Ceylonese polity could seldom be anything more than that of a junior partner.

Ramanathan, on the other hand, was much less visionary and idealistic. For him, the numerical inferiority of the Tamils needed to be accepted as a fact, and on that realistic basis it was imperative to protect the special interests of the Tamils by emphasising their distinctive communal identity. Under British rule it would mean unabashed, collaboration with the imperial power in return for the protection of minority interests, and an insistence on a special if not privileged status as the price of acceptance of the eventual transfer of power by the British. G. G. Ponnambalam's "fifty-fifty" campaign was the *reductio ad absurdum* of this process of political activity, just as the Tamils' pursuit of a federal political structure is its apotheosis. Common to all this were two basic considerations: the emphasis on Tamil nationalism as something essentially divergent from, if not positively hostile to, Sinhalese nationalism, and second the rejection, tacit or explicit, of Arunachalam's concept of a Ceylonese nationalism (and a Ceylonese polity). There was a hard-headed pragmatism in all this for events were to demonstrate that for the Sinhalese themselves the concept of a Ceylonese polity could hardly hold its own against the compelling attractions of Sinhalese nationalism. But this is to anticipate events.

If the crucial weakness of the policy of responsive co-operation was the acceptance by the Tamils of a role of junior partner *vis-a-vis* the Sinhalese, Ramanathan's political activities of the 1920's were to demonstrate the fact that fostering a Tamil communal identity or Tamil nationalism, presumed the willing acceptance of the role of collaborators in the maintenance of imperial interests, and the price of collaboration was subordination to British interests. Ramanathan despite his decisive role in the politics of the country between 1921 and 1924 never achieved anything approaching the status of political pre-eminence which Arunachalam enjoyed till his departure from the Congress; he was subordinate always to that master political manipulator, Sir William Manning.

Indeed the prime beneficiary of these shifts and changes in the political and scene was Manning, for the initiative in politics was now unmistakably with him and he seized it with amazing dexterity to fashion the further discomfiture of the Congress. This present essay is a study in depth of Manning at work in organizing the resistance to political reform with the assistance of Ramanathan and the latter's associates. It affords a splendid case study in the systematic application of a policy of *divide-et-impera*. All the necessary ingre-

dients were there in full measure: a determination on the part of the imperial power to maintain its position, without substantial concessions to demands for a transfer of a share of political power, by resorting to the exploitation of existing or potential 'communal' disharmony; willing collaborators among minority groups; and lastly, the failure of the leaders of the majority community to adopt a policy of concession and compromise sufficiently flexible to retain the support of the more articulate and numerous minority groups.

Manning knew that the next phase in the evolving political crisis in the island would begin with the discussion of firm proposals on constitutional reform which the Congress leadership were due to submit to him soon. Ever since their meeting with him on 29 November 1920 the constitutionalist leadership in the Congress had been preparing a scheme of constitutional reform. And James Pieris on whom the leadership in these matters had devolved, had adopted a policy of keeping Manning informed of the nature of the changes they wished to ask for. At the same time James Pieris regarded an accommodation with the minorities as vital to the success of his endeavours, and he sought first of all to reach an understanding with Ramanathan (then a nominated unofficial member of the Legislative Council) who was by now the most influential of the Tamil leaders. In a letter to Ramanathan on 15 October 1921¹ he attached a "scheme of Reform which has been drawn up on lines agreed upon by the members of the Council who have taken the loyalty pledge² but had not yet been submitted to them for approval". He added that these proposals were still "confidential". They were intended to form the basis for discussions between the Congress group and the minority representatives. "When we meet at the Finance Committee on the 20 [October]", he informed Ramanathan, "we can arrange a day for a conference..."

When the conference did take place, James Pieris presented his proposals for discussion—he intended eventually to introduce them in the form of a resolution in the Legislative Council—and it soon became clear that there were sharp differences of opinion between the Congress group and the minority representatives. These differences of opinion were so far-reaching that agreement on the principles of constitutional reform—not to mention unanimity—became patently impossible. One outcome of the discussion and something which Pieris did not anticipate, was that a group of unofficial members of the Legislative Council under Ramanathan's leadership, minority representatives, but with one or two Sinhalese members who had not taken the Congress pledge.

1. *Ramanathan MSS.* Pieris's letter to Ramanathan, 15 October 1921.

2. The reference is to a loyalty pledge taken by Congress candidates under the terms of a resolution adopted at the Congress sessions of 18 December 1920.

took up the position that just as a group of Congress members had met the Governor to discuss the question of constitutional reform, they should themselves meet Manning to place their views before him. This decision was taken ("unanimously agreed to") in the presence of the Congress members themselves. On 4 November Ramanathan led this delegation to a discussion with Manning and his advisers. It was composed of Tamil, Muslim, European, Burgher and Indian representatives. One Sinhalese member, O. C. Tillekeratne appeared on this delegation, while Ramanathan claimed that he had the tacit support of two others, the two Kandyan nominated members, Meedeniya and Panabokke.³

The main theme of discussion at the conference with Manning was with regard to the composition of the Legislative Council and the related question of representation on the basis of constituencies. Two sets of proposals were reviewed: James Pieris's scheme set out before the unofficial members of the Legislative Council (Ramanathan brought a copy of this document with him to the conference), and a scheme prepared by the Tamil Mahajana Sabha in accordance with a resolution adopted on 15 August 1921 at the inauguration of that organisation.⁴ Both schemes envisaged the enlargement of the Legislative Council to about fifty members four-fifths of whom were to be elected, but where the guiding principle in James Pieris's scheme was election on the territorial principle, that of the Tamil Mahajana Sabha was based on a dilution of the territorial principle and an emphasis on communal electorates (although on a territorial basis).⁵ This latter scheme envisaged the distribution of seats in the Legislative Council in the proportion of two Tamil seats to three Sinhalese, and in addition the reservation of seats for important minorities. Thus the city of Colombo would have no less than six reserved seats, one each for the Sinhalese, Tamils, Indians, Mohammedans, Burghers and Europeans.

One significant point emerged from these discussions, that the Tamils were dissatisfied with the representation accorded to them under James Pieris's proposed scheme. The manner in which Manning drew this out and sought to exploit it to the disadvantage of the Congress is revealed in the following extract from the official minutes of proceedings of this conference.⁶

"His Excellency the Governor. I do not know whether the Tamils will say they are satisfied with their representation.

3. Minutes of Proceedings of the conference with Manning, held on 4 November 1921 (hereafter, *Minutes*, 4 November 1921). These minutes were printed and distributed under confidential cover to those who attended the conference. They were not meant for general circulation.

4. *ibid.*, p. 1.

5. The constituencies would be territorial, but the votes would be determined on the basis of communal interests.

6. *Minutes*, 4 November 1921, p. 3.

The Hon. Messrs. E. R. Tambimuttu and W. Duraiswamy. We are not, Sir.

*The Hon. Sir Thomson Broom.*⁷ If the Tamils are given more members, we shall want more members too. It is quite obvious that the Tamils are not in favour of the Congress proposals".

The opening provided by this exchange of views was too good to miss, and Manning went on at this stage to suggest a totally different line of action from that discussed at the Conference up to this point.

"You must remember as regards the Congress", he said, "that it is an organised and powerful body; that it has funds, and has been able to send home, not only a deputation, but also agents on its behalf. I have always said that if you do not agree with the views of Congress, you must take steps to bring your own views to the notice of the Secretary of State".⁸

But this hint was not immediately taken and though the discussions were cordial enough no firm conclusions were reached; instead a decision was taken to prepare a set of concrete proposals to be set before the Governor. The important point was that Ramanathan still hoped that it would be possible to prepare such proposals in conjunction with other members of the Legislative Council as well, including those who belonged to Congress.

Immediately Manning responded by setting what amounted to practically impossible conditions for such proposals. We turn to the official minutes again for this illuminating extract.⁹

His Excellency the Governor: In talking over this matter with Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, I told him: "If you put up a scheme to which you all, without exception, agree, and you say that the scheme is one which the present Members of the Legislative Council have authorised you to put before me as a scheme which has been accepted by all, I must forward it to the Secretary of State and say: 'It is the unanimous opinion of the Members of the Legislative Council that the further reforms in regard to the Council should proceed on these lines'." I may criticise them, but in the circumstances I must accept them.

The Hon. Sir Thomson Broom. It is impossible for us to be unanimous. *The Hon. Sir Ponnambalan Ramanathan:* I am still in hopes that we may be unanimous.

The Hon. the Attorney General [Sir Henry Gollan]: I think, Sir, all that is wanted is that there should be practical unanimity.

7. European representative.

8. *Minutes*, 4 November 1921, p. 3.

9. *ibid.*, p. 5.

His Excellency the Governor: If the whole of the communities are agreed, we could say that we had practical unanimity.

The Hon. Sir Thomson Broom: If we are not able to be unanimous, we must put forward our views".

Unanimity was impossible to achieve in the context of the strained relations between the Sinhalese and Tamils, and nobody knew this better than Manning. He was merely setting up—for the Congress—an insuperable obstacle, making certain that when, inevitably, unanimity would prove impossible to attain, the initiative would shift irretrievably away from it.

Throughout November 1921 there was still a faint hope that Congress could reach an accommodation with the Tamil Mahajana Sabhai on the question of constitutional reform. Two conferences were held on 16 and 17 November (at 'Sravasti', the residence of Dr. W. A. de Silva) organised by C. E. Corea, and presided over by St. Nihal Singh an Indian journalist at which attempts were made to reach an understanding, if not a settlement, but without success. For the Tamils the special reserved seat in the Western Province was a non-negotiable demand, while James Pieris on behalf of the Congress was equally adamant in not conceding it. When the Colombo Tamil Association also finally and unexpectedly supported the demand for a reserved seat for the Tamils an impasse was reached. Nor would Pieris consider the acceptance of the principle that no two communities together should command a majority in the Legislative Council. He made only one minor concession: in response to Tamil pressure he reduced the number of Legislative Councillors envisaged under his projected scheme of reforms from fifty to forty five.

To Pieris the failure to reach substantial agreement with the Tamils was a bitter blow. For he could not postpone much longer the publication of his reforms scheme.¹⁰ The proposals were published in their entirety on 26 November. Apart from spelling out the demands of the Congress on constitutional reform, these proposals also sought to meet the substance of Tamil claims for the modification of the territorial principle by giving special weightage to the Tamils on a territorial basis. It was also announced that this scheme was to be incorporated in a formal resolution which James Pieris was scheduled to introduce for discussion in the Legislative Council in early December. This resolution, as it finally appeared, had thirteen clauses of which the eighth dealt with the distribution of constituencies on a territorial basis; and a breakdown of the constituencies so delimited was provided.

It was characteristic of James Pieris that he should have announced his intention to introduce a formal resolution on constitutional reform, and given publicity to this, without first ensuring its endorsement by the executive

10. For his reforms proposals, see below Appendix A pp. 39-40.

committee of the Congress. At first it did appear that the constitutionalist leadership in the Congress would give this resolution their support, and E. J. Samerawickreme, F. R. Senanayake, and A. St. V. Jayawardene among others gave it their blessings.¹¹ But it soon became evident that their endorsement was both lukewarm and conditional. Within a few days of the publication of the scheme a newspaper campaign was launched (most prominently in *The Ceylon Daily News*) against the eighth clause, and the allocation of constituencies embodied in it. This newspaper campaign reflected a sharp difference of opinion among the Congress leadership on this aspect of the reforms.¹²

In the first week of December 1921 the Legislative Council began to debate Pieris's resolution on constitutional reforms. In introducing his motion he deleted the original eighth clause of the motion and substituted in its place the following: "(8) That the distribution of seats be made on the recommendations of a commission to be appointed for the purpose". He explained that he had personally always been of the opinion that the distribution of seats should be made on the recommendation of a commission, but that there had been disagreement on this in the committee of the National Congress where the view was expressed that the scheme of constituencies embodied in his original motion might have formed the basis for agreement with the minorities, in particular the Tamils. This expectation had not been realised, and therefore he had reverted to his original proposal of dealing with the matter by means of commission.

Though Pieris himself did not say so, it was obvious that a section of the Congress leadership were critical of the allocation of seats embodied in the eighth clause, and obvious too that the substitution of a clause about a commission was introduced largely to meet their criticisms. The immediate effect of the substitution was to create suspicion among Tamils. Representatives of Tamil opinion urged the Tamil members of the Legislative Council to oppose Pieris's motion in its entirety if the eighth clause were amended in the manner proposed by him.¹³ This was a curious stand to take for the Tamils had even more reason to be perturbed by the allocation of seats incorporated in Pieris's original eighth clause, than any section of the Congress.

Evidently the Tamil opposition to the substitution was a tactical move. On a closer look the leading spokesmen for the Tamil Mahajana Sabhai saw advantages in the change made by Pieris.¹⁴ They urged Ramanathan to stress two points:

11. See, *Ceylon Daily News*, 28 November 1921
12. *Ceylon Daily News*, 29 and 30 November 1921.
13. See, for instance, a telegram from W. D. Niles to Ramanathan (telegram 361 of 1 December 1921) which read as follows 'If Pieris moves Commission please see Tamils not committed by earlier resolution to exclusive territorial electorates'. *Ramanathan MSS* in the possession of Mr. J. T. Rutnam.
14. *Ramanathan MSS*. A. Sabapathy's letter to Ramanathan, 7 December 1921, enclosing a note from Ambalavanar Kanagasabhai, on points of discussion for the forthcoming Legislative Council debate. This note too bore the date 7 December 1921.

"we are anxious that the principle of twenty eight territorial seats required by the Hon'ble Mr. James Pieris should not be admitted by the Council. It should be left to the committee or commission to decide the matter".

They believed that a committee of the council was better for the purpose of allocating seats than a commission. The second point was that:

"In no case should any single community be allowed to have such a majority as would not require the co-operation of at least a few members of other communities for passing or adopting any measure".

They reckoned that under James Pieris's original proposals there would be twenty two Sinhalese members of the Legislative Council (including Kandyan) while there would be seventeen seats for all other communities.¹⁵

Briefly, the Tamils themselves saw great potential advantages in the substitution effected by James Pieris, but they desired a committee of the Legislative Council rather than a commission. When Ramanathan made this proposal in the course of the debate Pieris eagerly accepted it. The terms in which the acceptance was made were to cause difficulties later on. Pieris said:

"I am glad that the nominated Tamil member [Ramanathan] does not want a Commission but is content to leave it to a Committee of this house. I accept that proposal. Just now proposals have been made to me to come to an understanding. That can be done after the present discussion, and after the votes have been taken on my motion. Government would then be in a position to understand what the opinion of the different members would be on the points raised in the motion. During the holidays, to which we are looking forward, it may be possible to see whether we could in any way lessen the burden of the Committee, or dispense with it altogether".

One amendment to Pieris's eighth clause was moved by the Attorney General, Sir Henry Gollan, that the committee would determine not merely the distribution of seats, but the allocation of seats as well. These amendments were adopted without a division.

James Pieris had not intended that his resolutions should be voted upon, but merely that there should be a full discussion and statement of views. The idea of a vote at the conclusion of the debate was Manning's, but Pieris did not object when the governor decided on this. Manning proceeded to use the voting strength of the government to delete sections of the resolutions which he was opposed to, and to amend others. Indeed during the debate he had intervened with decided effect to secure the rejection by the Legislative Council of the first clause of Pieris's resolution—viz.

15. *ibid.*

"That the Legislative Council should be constituted, so that, with due safeguards for minorities, it should consist of forty-five members, of whom six should be officials and twenty-eight elected on a territorial basis".

Also rejected in a similar manner was the second clause, closely connected to the first:

"That the non-territorial electorates and the representation of minorities provided for in the present constitution be retained; but the Burgher and Mohammedan communities be represented by two members each".

The governor had used the 'official bloc' to defeat these clauses. At the Colonial Office, there was some criticism (not conveyed to Manning) of the governor's tactics.

"If the Official Vote had not been used the first section would have been carried by a majority of one, since all the communities except the Sinhalese voted against it, and the Governor and the Secretary of State would have been clearly entitled to give full weight to this fact when considering the Resolution, which effected nothing but was merely a recommendation to the Secretary of State".¹⁷

But Manning knew that Tamil opinion was hostile to this clause and from his own point of view the use of the 'official bloc' to defeat it was tactically sound for it demonstrated his commitment to support the Tamils.

James Pieris, it was clear, had the hope that negotiations between Congress representatives and the minorities would continue during the months ahead when the Legislative Council was in recess, and that eventually the Allocation Committee would be presented with a scheme which had the support of the two groups. But this did not happen. For one thing the view was widely expressed by influential Congressmen that he had made a tactical blunder in accepting the proposal for an Allocation Committee consisting of members of the Legislative Council. But more important, the question of a reserved seat for Tamils in the Western Province continued to prove an insuperable obstacle to an agreement with the Tamils.

On 14 December *The Times of Ceylon* carried an interview with Arunachalam in which he came out with a strong attack on the Congress.

16. On 10 December 1921 when a vote was taken only one Sinhalese member—Dr. Marcus Fernando—voted with the government; and the minorities against the first and second clauses. There was not a single minority member voting for the resolutions.

17. C.O. 54/853. H. R. Cowell's Memorandum of 7 August 1922.

"My feeling is one of profound distress", he declared, "not with regard to the Legislative Council resolutions, or the reforms debate which are of transitory interest, but with regard to the position of the Ceylon National Congress and Ceylon's goal of responsible government. Everyone must see that the goal cannot be reached unless there is mutual trust, harmony and co-operation between the various sections of our island population..."

He charged that James Pieris

"and his friends have by their blunders wrecked the Congress, destroyed its power and prestige, reduced it from a National Congress to one representing mainly a section of the Sinhalese, destroyed the feeling of mutual confidence and co-operation between the various communities, and put back the attainment of the goal of swaraj indefinitely".

This statement was issued against the background of the Legislative Council debate on constitutional reforms, and more important, of the forthcoming sessions of the Ceylon National Congress for which preparations had been made. Among these preparations were preliminary negotiations with the Tamils in the hope that an influential delegation from the North would participate. The failure of the conferences of 16 and 17 November did not leave much hope in this regard, and Arunachalam's statement to the *Times of Ceylon* made it clear that he would not attend, and it is certain that the stand taken by him would have discouraged any Tamil politicians of influence from the North, from participating. When the Congress sessions were held on 22 and 23 December one very very striking feature was the absence of the prominent Tamil politicians from the North.

As Arunachalam's interview to *The Times of Ceylon* on 14 December had made clear, one of the crucial factors in the breakdown of negotiations was the failure to honour the pledge given by Pieris and Samerawickreme in December 1918 about a reserved seat for the Tamils in the Western Province. It became one of the major themes of discussion at the Congress sessions, but the whole tone of it was one of denial of responsibility by Congress as a body for undertakings given by individual members at an earlier date. Thus, H. J. C. Pereira as President of Congress argued that

"... it may be that for political reasons, individual members with perfectly honest intentions, with the idea of maintaining unity have entered into certain compromises and bargains with individuals of the North. The Congress as Congress knows, nothing of all this. We are not responsible for all this...."¹⁸

18. *Handbook of the Ceylon National Congress* (hereafter, *Handbook, CNC*) ed, Bandaranaike, S. W. R. D. (Colombo, 1928) p.

And G. A. Wille moving the first resolution at the Congress sessions said:

“A promise regarding a reserved seat for the Tamils of Colombo made by one or two prominent members of the Congress out of excessive regard for the fears of men of the isolated North.... had been so distorted as to implicate the whole of Congress”,¹⁹

The outcome of this was easily predictable—any hopes that James Pieris may have entertained of an agreement with the minorities, especially the Tamils on the allocation and distribution of seats in a reformed Legislative Council were now shattered beyond repair. Moreover, the rift between the Sinhalese and the Tamils had not only been made public, but had assumed the level of a serious political crisis. At the centre of the crisis, and assuming a significance out of all proportion to its intrinsic worth, was the special seat for the Tamils of the Western Province.

Though the Legislative Council had on 10 December 1921 endorsed the proposal to appoint an Allocation Committee, the actual appointment was not made till the middle of June 1922 by which time the political situation in Ceylon had changed unmistakably to the detriment of the Congress. Manning now scarcely concealed his hostility to the Congress—he was constantly referring to it as the “so-called National Congress” in his private letters to the Colonial Office²⁰—and he threw his weight behind the minorities.

When James Pieris suggested to Manning that a detailed review of the debate (and votes) in the Legislative Council on his resolutions of December 1921 should be sent to the Colonial Office, Manning acceded to this request with great reluctance. The review was eventually sent, with a far from friendly commentary by Manning, and more significantly, only after he had resumed negotiations with the minorities on a course of action he had suggested to them on 4 November but which had not been acceptable to them till the breakdown in relations between the Sinhalese and Tamils appeared to indicate it as a viable alternative to any further efforts to a search for a consensus. The course of action decided upon was to prepare a detailed memorandum setting out the views of the minorities on constitutional reform, and drafting a scheme of constituencies and representation on a communal basis to be prepared in consultation with Manning. This memorandum²¹ as it finally emerged ready for signature on 21 February 1922 was the work, in the main, of Ramanathan, though it had the endorsement and encouragement of Manning. Moreover, Manning, had come to the conclusion that the Allocation Committee was in fact a superfluity though he was still publicly committed to its appointment.

19. *ibid.*

20. See particularly, C.O. 54/851, Manning's private letter to Grindle, 1 March 1922, C.O. 54/852, Manning's private letter to Grindle, 1 April 1922

21. This memorandum is in C.O. 54/852

The first hint that Manning gave of his new line of policy came in a private letter of 1 March 1922 to a Colonial Office legal expert, Sir G. Grindle in which he stated that:

"The minorities have succeeded in settling their differences and I shall shortly send you in a separate despatch the results arrived at; but as you will see by the despatch I hope to send today we are first bound to refer to a Committees of the Legislative Council for their proposals in regard to the allocation and distribution of seats for the territorial electorates.

"My private opinion, and as is foreshadowed in the memorandum of the minority communities which will soon reach you is that the Committee to be appointed if the Secretary of State agrees to the suggestion, may possibly [be] coming to no agreement; and in that case it is Government that will have eventually to adjudicate upon the various proposals placed before it, and that which I am about to send you [the minorities memorandum] is certainly a very well thought-out scheme..."

On 1 April when he sent the minorities joint memorandum he told Grindle that

"...the Congress is no longer the body that it was, and, as they say, it is somewhat discredited though it is still vocal.

"There is a complete split between the Sinhalese and the 'rest' and I doubt very much, as do the signatories of the Joint Memorandum, whether the deliberations of the suggested Committee of the Legislative Council on the subject of the allocation and distribution of seats will result in anything definite being produced, though I hope they may be able to settle their differences. I think they will not try; since it will be left to Government to endeavour to draw up a scheme which, [sic] when promulgated they will proceed to tear to shreds with vicious clamour and dishonest protestations.

"However, we are so inured to that sort of thing that we shall not feel it deeply, and if we attempt to satisfy all we shall dissatisfy the lot".

He sent the joint memorandum to the Colonial Office on 1 April with his warm approval and strong endorsement, while simultaneously a Congress memorandum on constitutional reform sent along with it, was accompanied by a blistering confidential memorandum on the Congress in which it was both condemned and reviled.

It was in mid-June 1922²² that the question of the appointment of the Allocation Committee came up for discussion in the Legislative Council. By this time Congress representatives in the Legislative Council had second thoughts about this committee. Pieris, in particular, had been criticised for accepting Ramanathan's proposal for a committee—a commission may have been more acceptable—and he was not disinclined to think of some plausible reason for abandoning the whole thing. As it was Manning's decision to use

22. 16 and 22 June 1922.

the official bloc to outvote Pieris's supporters on the first clause of his resolution provided the latter with the excuse they needed. They now took the view that there would be no point in proceeding with the discussion until the government informed them what was to be the total composition of the new Legislative Council. This was a patently poor argument since it was open to the proposed committee to make any recommendations which they thought fit to report. One of the Tamil representatives subsequently proposed that the committee should contain a majority of territorial members and when the government accepted this proposal, they were depriving Congress representations of much of the force of their argument that the committee would effect nothing. Nevertheless the Congress representatives would not change their minds on this, and when Manning proceeded to appoint the committee, seven members of the Legislative Council refused to serve on it. Even though the majority of territorially elected representatives refused to serve on it or cooperate with an Allocation Committee, Manning proceeded to appoint one nevertheless without any Congress members on it.²³

Both sides were indulging in noisy pretension. Pieris and his Congress supporters were relieved that they were not serving on a committee which had become a political embarrassment to them, and in whose deliberations they had no faith. The Congress committee, meeting on 24 June, only two days after the conclusion of the Legislative-Council debate on the Allocation Committee, endorsed the stand taken by James Pieris and the Congress representatives in the Legislative Council on this issue, but the resolution they adopted went far beyond anything stated by their party supporters in the course of the debate. It read thus:

This Committee is of opinion that the appointment of the [Allocation Committee] ... can serve no useful purpose and that such proceeding can only delay the Reform of the Constitution. It deprecates the adoption by the Legislative Council on the 10th December 1921, of a resolution for the appointment of such a committee and approves the action of those elected members who refused to serve on the Committee'.²⁴

As for Manning, the appointment of the Allocation Committee was a piece of elaborate pantomime, for he had already committed himself to a strong endorsement of the scheme of distribution and allocation of seats outlined in the joint memorandum of the minorities. When the Allocation Committee made its report in July,²⁵ its recommendations bore a striking similarity to those in the joint memorandum.

23. The members of the Committee were: F. A. Stockdale [an official member] Chairman, J. Thomson Broom, C. E. Corea, Allan Drieberg, E. R. Tambimuttu, O. C. Tillekeratne, W. Duraiswamy, N. H. M. Abdul Cader, E. G. Adamaly, T. B. Panabokke.

24. *Handbook, CNC*, pp. 414-15. See, also *MSS Minutes, CNC*, 24 June 1922.

25. The report of the Allocation Committee was laid on the table of the Legislative Council on 20 July 1922. This report is printed in *Handbook CNC*, Appendix D, pp. 101-119.

One intriguing feature—for the Congress—in the report of the Allocation Committee, was the reference in it to the joint-memorandum of the minorities of 21 February. This provided confirmation of rumours prevalent at this time of Manning's secret negotiations with Ramanathan and a delegation of minority representatives led by him, and the despatch of a secret joint memorandum to the Colonial Office. Immediately there were demands from Congress representatives for information on the joint-memorandum, and requests for publication of that document, but Manning would divulge no information on it and resisted every attempt to secure its publication. But it did not remain a secret for very long, for on 16 August 1922 enterprising journalists on the *Ceylon Daily News* achieved a memorable scoop when, to the consternation of the government, they published the full text of the secret memorandum. Even at this stage the Governor would not himself officially publish this document.

In a strongly worded letter to the Colonial Office some of the Sinhalese members of the Legislative Council protested against Manning's partisanship and expressed their surprise at the failure to publish a document which though secret had nevertheless been referred to in the official report of the Allocation Committee.

As for Manning's own recommendations on constitutional reform, he had simply followed both in regard to principle and detail suggestions made in the secret joint-memorandum of the minorities. Some years later Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan in his oral evidence before the Donoughmore Commission (2 January 1928) confirmed that Manning's own despatch on reforms in April 1922 was based on the secret memorandum of the minorities presented to him on 21 February 1922 with "one or two words added here and there". Not only was a 2:1 ratio between Sinhalese and Tamil representation maintained, but the Tamils also obtained a reserved seat in the Western Province.

It is difficult to discern any distinct Colonial Office policy on constitutional reform in Ceylon, except the understanding that "there is nothing to be gained by expediting the further reform of the constitution so long as we do not openly delay the decision." Beyond this there was a tendency to leave the initiative to the man on the spot—the Governor—if he was inclined to take it, and to be guided by him.

In March 1922 Manning sent home a despatch on constitutional reform in Ceylon which was no more than a critical commentary on Pieris's resolution of December 1921 as it had emerged in its final form in the debate in the Legislative Council. To this Manning added a few suggestions of his own. The idea was that this despatch should form the basis of a policy statement from the

Secretary of State to be published in Ceylon. This the Colonial Office was willing to do, and a despatch (dated 19 April) was sent to Ceylon incorporating the bulk of Manning's suggestions, though some were adopted with modifications, with instructions that it be published. The date of publication was to be left to the Governor's discretion. The Secretary of State did not commit himself at all on the distribution of territorial constituencies, and the possibility of allocating a communal seat to the Tamils. On the other hand he did come to a firm decision not to increase the territorial seats beyond fifteen which was about half the number asked for by the Congress, and this was done with the interests of the minorities in the colony in mind.²⁶

But there was a change of policy with the receipt of the secret joint-memorandum of the minorities at the Colonial Office. The immediate response of the Colonial Office was not especially encouraging to Manning. Thus though it was conceded that the memorandum is of great importance as showing the strong insistence of "all the races in Ceylon, apart from the Low Country Sinhalese", on the maintenance of communal representation, "and the great reluctance of the other communities in Ceylon to submit to the domination of the Low Country Sinhalese....", it was nevertheless recognised that the "... the demands of the Tamils in this joint memorandum are somewhat excessive..." and that it would be "a doubtful measure to agree to communal representation for the Tamils who are a numerous and progressive class". As regards the reserved seat for the Tamils, the point was made that "the Secretary of State would naturally be somewhat reluctant to extend the communal principle of election any further than at present if it can be avoided".²⁷

Manning however made the shrewd decision to send his closest associate in the Ceylon government, the Attorney-General Sir Henry Gollan, to the Colonial Office to put his point of view across. And this move was immediately effective. The Colonial Office was won over completely to the view that the reform of the Legislative Council should follow the principles laid down in the secret joint memorandum of the minorities.

After preliminary discussions with Gollan, H. R. Cowell the Colonial Office expert on Ceylon came to the conclusion that

"It has clearly become necessary to modify the views expressed in the Secretary of State's despatch of the 19th April. This is necessitated by the subsequent receipt of the joint memorandum from the Minority Communities and by the explanations furnished both by the Governor and the Attorney General regarding the attitude taken up by those communities. The fact that all the communities in Ceylon, other than Singhalese [sic], have for the first time come together for a political purpose, and have drawn up unanimous recommendations for the reform of the Constitution

26. C.O. 54/854. H. R. Cowell's memorandum of 16 May 1922

27. C.O. 54/852. H.R. Cowell's minute of 3 May 1922.

is, of course, important, and sufficiently justifies the modification of views expressed before this fact was known and based on a despatch from the Governor written before this joint memorandum had reached him. ...It is now very desirable that the Secretary of State should definitely express his views in favour of a system of Communal Representation based on that recommended by the joint minorities..."²⁸

Cowell went on to add that:²⁹

"... if the Secretary of State should ignore the joint memorandum of the Minorities and take the Congress side, the effect will be only to drive into opposition a very large section of the population without ensuring the support of the Sinhalese, many of whose demands are in any case inadmissible. We had indeed recognised this to some extent even before the receipt of the joint memorandum, and the despatch of the 19th April was intended to leave the door open for future discussion as to the distribution of seats. But the Attorney General argues with considerable force that it is essential definitely to accept the views expressed in the joint memorandum as to communal representation as soon as any public pronouncement is made...."

Cowell and the Colonial Office had been convinced by Gollan's argument that:

"To support the minorities... [will] make for stability since it will mean a large and important section of the population will work in harmony with the Government, while to meet the demands of the Sinhalese would drive the minorities into opposition and would only lead to fresh demands from the Sinhalese".³⁰

It is also evident that the Colonial Office, like the Ceylon Government, treated the Allocation Committee and the report it was expected to produce, with engaging cynicism. Thus Cowell on 12 July 1922 asked to prepare a draft despatch on constitutional reform which was to be a substitute for that sent on 19 April, "pending the report of the Allocation Committee" urged that since ... "seven of the Sinhalese members have declined to sit on that committee it may be assumed that contrary to expectation, it will produce a report, and that report will follow the lines indicated in the joint memorandum. But the report must be awaited in order that reference may be made to it in the despatch".

By the middle of July 1922 the Colonial Office had taken the decision to

"prepare a scheme for the composition of the Council which was to be based on the principle of the joint memorial, and which would not advertise itself as being the same scheme".³¹

Though Manning's despatches and private letters to the Colonial Office should have provided strong evidence of a persistent policy of deliberate exacer-

28. C.O. 54/857. H. R. Cowell's Minute of 12 July 1922.

29. *ibid.*

30. C.O. 54/857. H. R. Cowell's minute of 6 July 1922.

31. *ibid.*

bation of communal rivalries in order to thwart the Congress and the low-country Sinhalese, it was only in September when a letter from Sinhalese members of the Legislative Council,³² written in the wake of the *Ceylon Daily News* scoop of the secret joint-memorandum of the minorities, made grave charges against the Governor, of collusion with the minorities, of distortion of information to the Colonial Office, and of gleeful fanning of the flames of communal rivalry, that the Colonial Office began to take a fresh look at these problems. This letter did create doubts in the minds of the permanent officials as regards the line of policy on constitutional reform in Ceylon so far adopted. H. R. Cowell commented that "... I have several times expressed doubts as to the propriety of extending the communal principle to the Tamils who should be large enough a community to look after themselves".

More important was Cowell's statement that

"... it would be very difficult to resist the claim for a majority of territorially elected members in the next Council. Nothing less will satisfy the great majority of the unofficials in the present Council, and the government cannot shelter themselves indefinitely behind the signatories of the joint memorandum, who only represent the smaller communities in Ceylon, since it is quite clear that a large body even of Tamil opinion favours such a majority. After all, the Governor always has his reserve powers, the representatives of the smaller communities must exert themselves to convert to their views some members of the territorial majority...."

He realised, of course, that the great obstacle to the introduction of this principle was the Governor who "will not give up without a struggle his desire to have a practical majority in the Council in addition to his reserve powers...."³³

When the reforms of 1923 were announced³⁴ it was clear that Manning's views had prevailed. For one thing there was no majority of territorially elected members in the new Legislative Council. But more important the reforms of 1923 were a decidedly meagre advance on those of 1920 and like the latter their major premise was that the various communities in Ceylon had different and conflicting interests which could be promoted and safeguarded only by diluting the principle of territorial representation with a strong dose of communal representation. The distribution of seats in the Legislature was so arranged that no two communities could between themselves have a majority in the Council, taking into consideration the elected as well as nominated members. Thus the government could still outvote the Sinhalese and Tamils who between them controlled twenty-two seats, provided that the minorities other than the Tamils rallied to its side. In addition, there was no diminution

32. C.O. 54/854, Letter of Sinhalese members of the Legislative Council enclosed in Manning to Churchill, 507 of 5 September 1922.

33. C.O. 54/854, H. R. Cowell's minute of 28 September 1923.

34. They were announced in the Duke of Devonshire's despatch to Manning, 11 January 1923. For this despatch see, *Handbook CNC*, pp. 120-127 of the Appendix.

of the governor's reserve powers. Congress proposals, mild and hesitant in themselves, for an extension of the franchise were rejected; and the Executive Council continued to be a predominantly official body, its unofficial members nominated by the governor and without any pretension or legal claim to serving as a link between the executive and the legislature.³⁵ Only one provision in the new constitution, and that a relatively minor one, could have given the Congress leaders some satisfaction—in the new council a member elected by the Council was to preside over its deliberations, a change from the practice that had prevailed since 1833 of the Governor presiding at sessions of the Legislative Council.

Manning had deftly outmanoeuvred the Congress leadership. The latter, confronted with the very meagre concessions made to them in this constitution were too dispirited and demoralised to devise any but the most conventional means of demonstrating their dissatisfaction.³⁶ They rejected the appeal of the radicals in their midst to adopt more forceful agitational tactics to demonstrate their antipathy to Manning's policy. Instead they persisted in their normal mode of agitation which without in any way disturbing Manning only drove the radicals to despair.³⁷ When A. E. Goonesinha at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Congress held in December 1923 moved a resolution "that the Ceylon National Congress do reject the Order in Council [of 1923] as utterly inadequate and formulate a scheme of non-cooperation with a view to boycotting the new Legislative Council", the committee rejected this by fifteen votes to six.³⁸

The Congress leadership preferred to help in working the new constitutional machinery as an exercise in political education. Thus H. J. C. Pereira in his presidential address at the annual session of the Congress in April 1923, urged his audience to

"offer thanks for what had been given, just as much as condemn anything that was not given... Political rights could not be secured in a day or two

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35. An elected member of the Legislative Council, if nominated to the Executive Council, was required to resign his elected seat and (at best) accept a nominated one at the Governor's hands.
36. At the Congress sessions held on 23 March 1923, with the Vice-President, C. E. Corea in the chair, the following resolution (proposed by C. E. Corea, and seconded by E. T. de Silva) was unanimously adopted "This Congress condemns as unsatisfactory and reactionary the scheme of Reforms proposed in the Secretary of States Despatch dated 11th January and reasserts the necessity for a substantial territorial-elected majority in the Legislative Council". Thereafter the sessions were adjourned for 20-21 April.
37. At the Congress sessions of 20-21 April H. J. C. Pereira presided. For the resolutions adopted on that occasion see below p. 35.
38. *Handbook, CNC*, p. 605

or even in a hundred years in certain cases. The present British Parliament was evolved generally into its present representative character and even now they must realise that the House of Lords, thwarts legislation sent up by the Commons in England just as much as the Governor was able to do here in this country. They had progressed to a certain point. They must bide their time in patience and by constitutional agitation they would achieve their ends...'³⁹

In a sense they really had no other choice, given their total lack of faith in the masses (which concealed an inarticulate fear of their potentialities). Many thought in terms of A. E. Goonesinha as revealing what Gandhian tactics would lead to here. Besides Congress leaders feared that the adoption of more forceful tactics of opposition would be self-defeating, in that this would have contributed to the irrevocable alienation of the minorities. And they persisted in their belief, despite convincing evidence to the contrary, that the breach with the minorities could be healed.

Manning in the meantime continued to help widen the rift between the Sinhalese and Tamils. In June 1923 a public meeting was organised in Jaffna for the purpose of arranging a "fitting welcome to the Governor". Sir Ambalavanar Kanagasabhai (a nominated member of the Executive Council), as chairman of the Committee appointed to make arrangements for the governor's reception, remarked that the Tamils were beholden to Governor Manning "who had actually fought their case for them after having shown and advised them what they should do. And it was [he] who obtained for the Tamils the preferential treatment and concessions as outlined in the Draft Scheme of Reforms".

Congress leaders complained that in his speeches at Jaffna on this occasion, Manning amply confirmed Sir A. Kanagasabhai's "account of the genesis of the proposed scheme of representation". The *Times of Ceylon* in its issue of 13 June 1923 published the following summary of Manning's speech in reply to an address of welcome:

"His Excellency replied at length and thanked the Tamils for the welcome given him and [for] supporting his reforms despatch, and intimated that it would please them to hear that all his recommendations, including the seat in the Western Province had been sanctioned, and that the Secretary of State had further thanked the Tamils for simplifying his task. A high compliment was paid to Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan for the assistance given in drafting the reform proposals. The seats given to them, His Excellency said, were their birthright and they were justified in fighting for them".

Manning's political instincts were as sharp as ever, and he had picked on the one point—the reserved seat in the Western Province—which kept the

39. *Handbook, CNC*, p. 502.

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39. *Handbook, CNC*, p. 502.

Sinhalese and Tamil leadership, apart, the one issue on which neither side was willing to compromise. As recently as 22 October 1922 the Secretary of the Congress Committee had, in a letter to the Tamil Maha Jana Sabhai⁴⁰ made the point that:

“With regard to the claim for a reserved seat in Colombo for the Tamils, a strong feeling prevails here that the integrity of territorial representation should be maintained and even furthered as the only means of ultimately attaining responsible government...”

“This Committee feels that this [is a] question... upon which an agreement is hardly possible... This Committee trust that with the reservation of this one question your Association will find it possible to send delegates to the coming sessions of the Congress and co-operate with the rest of the country in regard to matters of common interest...”

In September 1923, H. J. C. Pereira as President of the Congress had proposed that ‘the reserved seat’ in the Western Province be converted into a seat for the Tamils for the whole island. But even this compromise was unacceptable to the Tamils.⁴¹

The Congress responded to the reforms proposals of 11 January 1923 by adopting unanimously at a meeting held on 20 April 1923, two resolutions: that

- (1) “This Congress condemns as unsatisfactory and reactionary the scheme of reforms proposed in the Secretary of State’s despatch of 11th January, and re-asserts the necessity for a substantial territorially-elected majority in the Legislative Council”.
- (2) “This Congress views with great misgivings and grave concern the reversion to Communal representation as the basic principle of the scheme, as undemocratic and calculated to cause disunion among the different communities in the Island”.⁴²

It was decided also to send a reforms delegation to Whitehall to place the Congress case before The Secretary of State for the Colonies, and the Colonial Office. The delegation prepared two comprehensive memoranda on constitutional reform setting out their proposals in detail, which they submitted to the Colonial Office.⁴³

Their efforts were not without success for a modification of the scheme was promised for early 1924 after elections to the new Legislative Council had been held. These modifications did not amount to any fundamental changes in the structure, but as a gesture of conciliation two more territorial seats were allowed.

40. See, *The Hindu Organ* 10 May 1923, *The Ceylon Independent*, 16 May 1923

41. *The Ceylon Independent*, 10 September 1923, 17 September 1923

42. *Handbook, CNC*, p. 522.

43. See, *Handbook, CNC*, pp. 530-563. The memoranda was presented by James Pieris and D B Jayatilaka on behalf of the Reforms Delegation

one each in the Western and Southern Provinces,⁴⁴ and the Colonial Office also yielded to the representations of the Muslims and the Indians (who were supported in this by the Ceylon National Congress) and agreed to the election instead of nomination of the Muslim and the Indian members, thus increasing the number of elected members to twenty eight. Thus a principle which Cowell had enunciated in September 1922 was at last adopted. This change gave Ceylon a representative legislature within the meaning of Section I of the Colonial Laws Validity Act. This may be regarded as a compromise on the first of the two resolutions adopted by the Congress in April 1923. But there was nothing done to give satisfaction on the second of the resolutions.

Under the 1920 constitution the Kandyan were given communal electorates, largely because of Manning's insistence. But within a year or so of the elections to the Legislative Council of 1921, the Kandyans were assured by the Congress leadership that territorial seats in the Kandyan Provinces under a reformed Legislative Council would not be contested by the low-country Sinhalese, and these assurances won the adherents of the communal principle among the Kandyans, over to a support of the territorial principle. Manning had watched this development with dismay. In a private letter to Grindle of 1 March 1922 he remarked that:

"... the Kandyans, I am afraid... have thrown in their lot with their Sinhalese Low-Country friends: up to a point I can understand their attitude, but it is not a pleasing revelation to me of their change of spirit. We shall hope, however, to protect them even against themselves in the long run".⁴⁵

The undertaking given by the Congress leadership to the Kandyans could never have been honoured for Congress did not have either the party machinery or the party discipline which could have enforced this decision on their supporters. In the 1924 elections only three Kandyan seats returned Kandyans to the Legislative Council. To explain the defeat of the Kandyans as being the result of their lack of sophistication in political matters, and a consequence of their resistance to the liberalising influences of western rule, as many did at that time,⁴⁶ afforded little consolation to the Kandyans. Indeed after the elections of 1924 the prominent Kandyan members of the Congress most notably A. F. Molamure, Dr. T. B. Kobbekaduwa, and P. B. Ratnayake associated themselves with the agitation for separate representation for "the Kandyan race "...

"... in our Legislative Assembly, and that our entity as a separate and distinct community should otherwise too be recognised".⁴⁷

44. Eventually there was no second seat for the Southern Province, but seats were assigned to two divisions of the Western Province (designated A and B) and one for the town of Colombo.

45. C.O. 54/851. Manning to Grindle, letter of 1 March 1922.

46. For example, an editorial in *the Ceylon Independent*, 13 November 1924.

47. *The Ceylon Independent*, 28 February 1925.

A Kandyan communal organisation, the Kandyan National Assembly was formed in 1925 in opposition to the Congress, and at the inaugural sessions of the Assembly held in December that year the Kandyan demand for separate representation was affirmed.

By November 1927 the Kandyan National Assembly put forward a demand for the creation of a federal state in Ceylon, with regional autonomy for the Kandyans.⁴⁸ Ulster was apparently the analogy they had in mind.⁴⁹ The faith in federalism as the solution to the Kandyan problem remained a keynote of their political demands for over a decade thereafter. They found Manning and his successor Sir Hugh Clifford very sympathetic to their demands and indeed quite eager to support their claims to a special status, in the hope of using the Kandyans as a conservative buffer against the forces of political agitation and reform.

By 1925 the Congress had been reduced to a demonstrably low-country Sinhalese organization. Manning's tactics had proved to be ruthlessly effective. Only a small group of radicals who adhered to Goonesinha had the resilience, imagination and tactical skill to attempt a new initiative in politics. The urban working class of Colombo was pushing its way into the political arena, and with that came glimpses of a new dimension in Ceylon politics. Indeed one of the most striking developments in Ceylon in the early 1920's was the emergence of a radical challenge to the domination of the island's politics. Political activity could no longer be confined to the upper strata of society to be manipulated by them in their own interest with total disregard of the rest of the population.

Within the Congress the radicals were a small and uninfluential force. While they shared with the Congress leadership a desire for self government as a political objective, they recognised, as the Congress leadership did not, the need for far-reaching social and economic reforms as the concomitant of political reform. Besides, the Congress leadership were totally opposed to a radicalisation of political activity, and to the introduction of agitational techniques which involved the bringing in of the masses into political activity. When the radicals eventually broke away from the Congress, that organisation, already weakened by the defection of the minorities, became more than ever a conservative organisation out of tune with the emerging political forces of the day.⁵⁰

48. See, *The Ceylon Independent*, 7 December 1925, 31 January 1927, 17 November 1927.

49. C.O. 54/886—File 32020, A.G.M.F[letcher]'s minute of 18 August 1927, enclosure in Hugh Clifford's confidential despatch of 19 September 1927 sent from Kuala Lumpur.

50. For discussion of these points see; de Silva, K.M. "The Reform and Nationalist Movements in the Early Twentieth Century," in ed., de Silva, K.M. *The University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon*, Vol. III. (Colombo, 1973). pp. 387-407, especially pp. 403-407; and de Silva, K.M. "The History and Politics of the Transfer of Power," pp. 489-533, especially pp. 489-497, in the same volume.