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# HARTAL!

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By

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# HARTAL!

**A**UGUST 12th, 1953 was a demonstration of the tremendous power of the masses in action. August 12th, 1953 demonstrated beyond doubting that the capitalist UNP Government headed by Mr. Dudley Senanayake has not only lost the confidence of the people but has also earned the people's active discontent. The vast upsurge of the masses which August 12th witnessed in village and town together, represented nothing less than an active vote of no-confidence in the UNP Government and a demand that it should resign immediately. It was a notice served on the UNP Government that the people could tolerate it no more.

## **A VERITABLE PEOPLE'S UPRISING**

The events of August 12th constitute, not an outbreak of "hooliganism" on a wide scale as the Government and Capitalist press would have it, but a veritable people's uprising. The Government broke its election promises, ignored the protests of the people, and refused to let the people decide the issue by a fresh general election. The angered people rose in active protest. As such, the entire August movement was a wholly democratic movement; and the August uprising was a deeply democratic act.

The almost insurrectionary high-points of the August 12th movement were reached in certain localities along the Western and South-Western seaboard, e. g., Maharagama, Boralessgamuwa, Gandawila, Kirillapone, Egoda Uyana, Katukurunda, Korawella, Waskaduwa, Karadeniya, Dompe, Akurala, Totagamuwa, Hikkaduwa, and Rajgama.

The movement also reached the proportions and level of a veritable mass uprising in the twenty four divisions of the Western, Southern and Sabaragamuwa Provinces in which the Emergency Regulations were longest maintained. These areas consist of the Alutkuru Korale South, Meda Pattuwa, Adikari Pattuwa, Siyane Korale, Alutgam and Panawal Korales, Colombo Mudaliyars'

Division, Salpiti Korale, Panadura Totamune, Kalutara Totamune, Bentota Walalawiti Korale, Wellaboda Pattu, Colombo Municipal area, the Urban Council areas of Ayissawella, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia, Gampaha, Jaela, Kolonnawa, Kotte, Wattala-Mabola-Peliyagoda, Beruwala, Kalutara, Panadura and Ambalangoda. Further, every Province of the island saw whole sections of the People participate in the protest-hartal in one form or another; saw strikes and demonstrations saw transport paralysed and shops closed; saw meetings of protest and black flags up. The Jaffna Peninsula in particular saw all this on the widest possible scale on August 12th, although there was no noteworthy violence reported.

It was thus a vast mass movement involving lakhs of people for certain, and certainly also enjoying the sympathy of millions of the population. It drew in every class except the capitalist class, even here however many elements of the smaller variety were drawn in - so powerful was the movement's sweep. Every race was in it except, of course, the white foreigners. Every religion was in it, including even the Roman Catholics - in the Negombo, Wennappuwa and Ragama areas for instance. Every caste was in it, and not merely the submerged castes or the minority castes. Besides, every one of these sections was involved not only in the movement generally, but also in the "fighting" itself. "Sabotage" for instance, was not confined to any particular racial, religious or caste areas. It was a general feature wherever the people went beyond the mere demonstration of protest and actually "joined battle" on the challenge of the capitalist U. N. P. Government and its ruling class supporters.

In at least the twenty four divisions named above, this mass movement reached the level of a mass uprising. That is to say, the people in these areas did not merely protest against the capitalist U. N. P. Government's measures; they came out to express their opposition to the capitalist U. N. P. Government itself in forms which the Government had either expressly prohibited or had used all its resources to prevent. In doing so, the people in these areas did not stop short at the point where they would have come in conflict with Authority and the Law. On the contrary, they carried through the expression of their opposition **in defiance** of Authority and the Law. That is to say, they stopped trains, buses and all other forms of

transport; they struck work and made others strike work; they caused shops and offices to close; and so on, **by every means at their command.**

Included in the means used was not only "peaceful persuasion." A variety of other methods was used. For instance, on the railway, rails and fish plates were removed. In Waskaduwa, the rails, and sleepers with them, had literally been torn up and turned over for a whole mile, and the telegraph posts also had been toppled over along the whole stretch. In Totagamuwa, the wooden sleepers had been set on fire, destroying the track. In probably hundreds of places in various areas the signal wires had been cut. Above all, in Egoda Uyana, the masses had literally invaded the station, captured a train and uncoupled the engine so that the train could not leave.

In respect of the bus system, similar and even more drastic methods were used; probably because of the arrogant announcement of certain bus owners that they would run their buses, whatever the situation. The hatred of the masses, always directed against the bus monopolists as being the economic creatures and political pillars of the capitalist U. N. P. Government, was now concentrated on these defiant owners; especially the Gamini Bus Co. Ltd., and the High Level Road Bus Co. Ltd. Their buses were first stopped, stoned, and smashed by the angered people. Their principal routes were then blocked and cluttered at numerous points with felled trees and the like, so that even a military escort could not get their buses through. It is noteworthy that several days elapsed before these Companies could again operate their buses at all, leave aside resume their normal services. Companies like the South Western Bus Co., Ltd. on the other hand, which did not go out of their way too much to defy the hartal, were able to resume most of their services promptly after August 12th. Their routes had not been unduly blocked; their vehicles had largely escaped damage.

In certain cases, it should be added, some plank bridges were said to have been removed and other small bridges dynamited. Similar methods were employed in respect of the communications services like the telegraphs, telephones and postal services. Telegraph and telephone wires were cut in many places, so that the Government had to depend on the radio. The postal services were paralysed primarily by the method of paralysing transport; although other mass methods of prevention were also used.

As far as the train services were concerned, a strike beginning at 12 midnight at the Colombo Running Shed, was supplemented by the methods set out above. Between the two, the paralysis of all principal lines was complete by noon on August 12th. The resumption of services, especially on the coast line, took several days although the strikers resumed work on the 13th. This long delay was due to the damage on the line.

In respect of other communication services, the most noteworthy was the action of the postal delivery workers. They refused to go out unless effectively escorted. Government was in no position to provide the escorts. In consequence, the postal deliveries stopped.

### **ROOTS OF THE MOVEMENT**

Let us go back at this point to the roots of the August 12th uprising. It is not necessary to go further back than the 1952 General Election.

The 1952 General Election was in the nature of an appeal for a vote of confidence by Mr. Dudley Senanayake personally. This was because Mr. Dudley Senanayake had become Prime Minister by a process which Sir John Kotalawala, his colleague and competitor, denounced as a process of deception.

The Prime Minister won his vote of confidence from the country by deceit. He hid the true economic situation and the financial position of his Administration from the people. He made to the people promises which he must have known he could not keep.

In particular, his party, the United National Party, made the following specific promise, repeated afterwards through its official organ the SIYARATA:- "So long as this Government lasts, a measure of rice will be 25 cts."

The 1952 General Election saw the U. N. P. to office with a dictatorial majority. It won a voting power in Parliament sufficient to enable it to change the Constitution if it willed. The Dudley Senanayake Administration seemed impregnably entrenched in power. But power is not a matter of Parliamentary majorities - as the capitalist U. N. P. Government was taught on August 12th.

In September 1952, the price of sugar was raised by 15 cts a pound and the rice ration was cut by a quarter measure. It was the first of a

series of blows at the masses. It was also the first stage in creating among the wide masses an active sense of having been deceived by the U. N. P. at the General Election. Within two weeks the L S S P collected 70,000 signatures to a petition protesting against these measures.

In 1953 there followed the removal of the free mid-day meal for the older school - children and the closing down of the milk - feeding centres. The kiddies too were becoming victims of U. N. P. policy. In the meantime, a hue and cry had begun in the capitalist press against the rice subsidy. It was an effort to prepare the country for the final decisive blow.

The capitalist U. N. P. Government paid no heed to protests. Its leaders were drunk with power. They were conscious of having successfully deceived the masses for so long, and therefore had a contempt for the masses. They were, moreover, confident that intimidation through the state would suffice to prevent trouble even if deceit would not. Consequently, in July this year, the Dudley Senanayake Administration struck the masses a rapid series of heavy blows.

Central to these heavy blows was the total removal of the rice subsidy and the raising of the price of ration rice from 25 cts to 70 cts a measure. Besides, the free mid-day meal in the school was totally abolished, a cut was introduced in the Public Assistance vote, rail fares and postal rates were raised, and the prices of cloth and cheap cigarettes increased.

### **PRECURSORS OF STORM**

The capitalist U N P Government probably thought that the situation would pass as before with ineffective protest meetings and unheeded petitions. But ominous news came through on 21st July, a day after the rice price increases had come into effect. **A group of men and women in the village of Randombe, between Balapitiya and Ambalangoda, had lain prone on the public road, blocking all traffic in protest against the rice price increases.** The police had not been able to disperse them with the threat of force. **The women in particular had been militant and defiant,** and had been persuaded to give up their hartal only with the greatest difficulty. One woman is reported actually to have told a policeman to remember that if the police had batons they themselves used kitul clubs to beat their coconut husks!

The Rando~~m~~be action spread on the following days to cover the villages of Madampe, Seenigama, Akurala and Totagamuwa (22nd), Balapitiya (23rd), Karandeniya, Uragama, and Ahungalla (24th). In Colombo a three-hour strike of the harbour workers on July 21st was followed by a half-day strike of the Wellawatte Spinning and Weaving Mills workers on July 23rd.

But the Capitalist U N P Government continued blind. It failed to realize that dissatisfaction had been transformed into active discontent. It obviously believed that, anyhow and at the worst, a little display of force would suffice. So the Government tried out this display of force at the two main foci of active discontent at the time namely Colombo, and the area broadly covered by the Ambalangoda, Balapitiya constituency which was the scene of the spreading traffic-blocking hartal wave. On July 23rd the police attacked with batons and tear gas the people at an Opposition all - parties rally at the Galle Face. On the next day they similarly attacked and dispersed a group of demonstrators who were repeating the Rando~~m~~be hartal at the village Ahungalla near Kosgoda.

The significant fact about both these police onslaughts is that **the people stood up to the attack and even fought back**. At the Galle Face, the battle actually swayed to and fro, up and down the Green; the people using stones and anything else to hand against the batons and tear gas bombs of the police. At Ahungalla, where a severe beating was taken from the police by the people, the police themselves were found to have knife injuries at the end. The people had not simply fled in the face of force.

A thoughtful Government would have seen the danger signal. But the U N P Government was both thoughtless and blind. It just could not grasp that its own violence was not serving to intimidate the people but only to anger them. Those whom the gods wish to crush, they first make blind!

In the meantime, the struggle against the abolition of the rice subsidy and against the capitalist U N P Government was also getting organised. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party wrote to the Communist-Samasamaja Front (of Pieter Keuneman and Philip Gunawardena) calling for immediate and unconditional unity (a) to support the masses in just struggle against the capitalist U N P Government and

(b) to assist the masses to achieve their objective of replacing the capitalist U N P Government with an Anti-capitalist Government. The principal trade union centres in the country, including Mr. Goonasingha's Ceylon Labour Union, came together and decided to invite the Opposition political parties to conference to consider the idea of a one day strike and hartal.

The strike was, of course, traditional; but the hartal idea was new to Ceylon. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party was quick to see that it provided a framework for the worker - peasant alliance in action. It provided a channel of struggle for the rural masses whose entry into the arena could give to the movement as a whole a sweep and power which a strike could never have by itself even if it was quite general to the working class. It could also bring in the city poor who were so badly hit by the rice price raise and who normally were not drawn into political action. What was more, it was a mass weapon capable of revolutionary development, as the August 1942 struggle in India had shown. As events were to prove, the hartal method was to prevail over the strike method on August 12th.

## **THE STRUGGLE FOR UNITY**

The struggle to obtain the united support of the Opposition parties for the developing struggle of the masses is interesting and instructive enough to deserve a separate section.

We have already mentioned the Lanka Sama Samaja Party's letter to the Communist-SamaSamaja Front, calling for immediate and unconditional unity to support the struggle and to help achieve the mass aim of an anti-capitalist government. This call was made in the background of the previous unity negotiations which had failed owing to the Communist - Samasamaja Front's insistence that the L S S P should virtually give up its political independence by undertaking not to criticise Stalinist Governments or even Stalinist parties anywhere in the world. This call was made, however, also in continuance of the L S S P's call for a united front on the extent of agreement which had been reached; namely, on the internal task of creating a broad front of all anti-U N P and anti-imperialist forces in Ceylon with a united working class as its core and as its leadership, with the aim of establishing a government under working class leadership.



The L S S P received no-reply to its letter; but the parties met along with other Opposition parties together with the trade union bodies. The S L F P could not make up its mind about the one day strike and hartal. With the S L F P not joining, the C I C and CWC refused to join and only agreed to hold protest meetings on the 12th in the estate areas, **after the day's work was over.**

In this situation, the ultimate call for the August 12th hartal and strike went out only in the names of the three Left parties and the C F of L, the C T U F, the Ceylon Labour Union, the Ceylon Mercantile Union and the Harbour and Dock Workers' Union. The Federal Party issued a call separately in support of the strike and hartal.

Events thus proved the correctness of the L S S P line that (a) the drawing together of a broad front of struggle depended on the coming together of the Left parties themselves first in a united front of their own, and (b) that the true basis for a united front of the Left parties depends not on prior political agreement between the Left Parties but on the needs of the masses **in struggle.** The question of freedom of criticism of the Stalinist Governments and parties in other countries notwithstanding, the united front of the Left parties was forged in action. It continues in the form of the continuation of the hartal and strike committee, to compel the capitalist U N P Government to resign and hold a General Election. And this united front continues despite the absence of any effort to agree even on the nature of the Government to replace the U N P. Each party is free to continue its propaganda in this matter for its own objective. The L S S P formulates this objective as an Anti-Capitalist Government to replace the capitalist U N P Government.

## **MASSES AND GOVERNMENT BOTH PREPARE**

The U N P Government was indeed marshalling its own forces for battle against the masses. Its primary weapon was intimidation; with press propaganda as a second main means. Threats of dismissals and other reprisals were brought not only against Government and Local Government employees but also against private employees through the employers' organisations. Co-operative stores and food shops were threatened with cancellation of licenses if they joined the hartal. At the same time, the police was ostentatiously strengthened for action, and the military were moved about publicly in an atmosphere of preparations to use force.

With these methods the clerical servants of the Government were successfully bludgeoned into conformity. The G C S U voted in its branches against strike action. So indeed did the Ceylon Mercantile Union and other organisations.

But, in the midst of general capitalist press jubilation over these results, the authorities probably failed to note the significance of two facts. Firstly the General Council of the G C S U resigned over the anti-strike vote and, although it won a vote of confidence thereafter, remained adamant in its refusal to remain in office. Secondly, although the Ceylon Mercantile Union did not get a strike decision, several constituent branches had voted for a strike and fully one third of the ballots as a whole were for a strike. Even the white collar employees were obviously deeply discontented. That was why the Mercantile Union, while voting against a strike voted unanimously in its General Council to join the protest hartal in the different form of wearing a black tie and walking to work; that is to say they would refuse to use transport and so become a demonstration in a certain fashion.

The real struggle between the Government and the Left was, however, among the Government workers. And there the tussle was long and keen. Government played on the fears still lurking on after the failure of the 1947 strike. The militants in the workshops had not only to work hard but secretly; for iron regulations were clamped down on them. Their efforts were supplemented by factory gate meetings at which Left leaders spoke. The important point in these speeches was that the duty of the workers themselves to decide was stressed. There was no strike call on the basis of "Obey the Leaders"

At the same time as the struggle for the strike went forward in the factories, the Left Parties in general, and the L S S P in particular were covering the country with a net work of meetings. The hartal call was heard everywhere; and especially in the L S S P strongholds. Thus, the rural masses began to come into the struggle; and there is no doubt that, in the areas outside Colombo where the Colombo workers live, the pressure of the rural population itself began to be felt strongly by hesitant elements among the working class. On the other hand, the workers in many a village took the rural lead and organised the struggle. Through this reciprocal action, the urban-rural alliance or worker-peasant alliance was achieved—the decisive fact in the success of the August 12th struggle.

**HARTAL**

The mounting tension could already be felt almost physically on the 10th and 11th. One sign of it was the monster size of the meetings. Another was the tremendous circulation being achieved by the news - sheets of the Left parties. The LSSP brought out the "Samasamajaya" "Samasamajist" and "Samadharmam" twice weekly towards the end, thus, in effect bringing out a paper six days in the week. The circulation was limited only by the capacity of our press to print; for the demand was tremendous. Probably a 100,000 of our papers went in to circulation in this period, countering capitalist press propaganda as never before. Besides, the Lake House papers in particular were suspect by the public and had not the effect of 1947 and 1952.

The 11th evening saw the University students in clash with the police at Kandy and Peradeniya. Batoned at Kandy, the demonstrating students retreated to the University at Peradeniya; only to be followed there and batoned once more, not only in the campus but also within Jayatilaka Hall. The outraged students fought back with whatever was to hand; clashed with the over-bearing pro-Vice Chancellor Attygalle himself; and despite his threats which echoed the Government's attitude, went on strike next day. The students literally compelled this gentleman to eat humble pie and go out and stand bail for the students who had been arrested. Incidentally the police themselves have since acknowledged that one of the students had been assaulted and arrested although he had taken no part in the demonstration or its attendant incidents.

The 11th also saw a great preliminary success of the people. The South-Western Bus Co. workers came to a strike decision; and their boss, Mr. Cyril de Zoysa, a pillar of the U N P, bowed before the storm. He stated to the men's Union representatives that he left his employees free to act as they thought best. It thereby became certain that the biggest bus operator in Ceylon would not function on the 12th.

Midnight saw the people's next great success. The Dematagoda Running Shed struck work. This was something which did not happen in 1947. The news was out the same night in L S S P leaflets just as news about the S W Bus Co. had been sent to other bus lines by LSSP leaflets the same evening.

The 12th morning dawned in Colombo with the L S S P leaders out and at the gates of the most important Government and private work places. The Harbour struck. The Ratmalana Railway Workshops struck. The tramways struck. The PWD factory at Kolonnawa struck. The D I Carpentry Workshops struck. The Wellawatta Spinning and Weaving Mills struck. Walker's workshop struck. The match workers struck. Tucker's struck. A host of smaller workplaces struck. It was like a rolling wave of strike action.

Then the shops and other establishments closed up. From Ratmalana to Pettah, from Pettah to Grandpass, from Grandpass to Borella, and from Borella to Pamankada, there was scarcely a shop open, so complete was this aspect of the hartal. Mass demonstrations persuaded the reluctant; prudence caused even the hostile to follow suit.

In the meantime, the bus lines went out of action one by one. But for a few scattered and shattered examples, not a bus was on the streets at 10 a. m. The normally busy Colombo roads looked bare and deserted; even the private cars being not one-tenth the usual number. The very rickshawmen and bullock-carters stayed away from the streets. The pavements were empty save for hopeless little queues at the bus stand and some trudging clerks. Few could get to work anyhow; and the Government offices, where some had been kept over-night at Government expense, simply could not function, whatever Government propaganda may claim.

Both the Colombo and Moratuwa Town Hall flew black flags. The Colombo Municipal Council had resolved to support the hartal and to call upon the Government to resign. The Municipal workers (excepting those in the health and sanitary services) struck work. The Samasamaja-dominated Moratuwa Urban Council went further and participated fully in the hartal despite the threats of the Local Government Services Commission.

It was a good-humoured people that Colombo saw that morning; watching a contingent of bhikkhus fasting at the Town Hall; laughing aloud at the sheer ineptitude of the "Daily News" headline averring "Work Goes On As Usual!" Lake House will never recover from that lie. Even the police were good-humoured. The military were conspicuous by their absence in most places.

As the day wore on, however, the situation changed; and with it, the temper of the people. Pettah saw police baton charges against people who just could not disperse if they would and who sometimes would not disperse even if they could. Ultimately the people fought back with bricks and stones torn up from the pavements. It was noted that the masses showed no fear, but fought back everywhere with determination. It was here that Edwin was shot, refusing to move from the pavement and baring his breast to the guns. We gave him a party funeral.

In the meantime news of fires at Volkart Bros., at the Manning Market and at Walkers Marine Engineering Establishment in the Harbour came through. Over in Kirillapone, at the exit from the other side of Colombo, the people had built a genuine barricade and withstood an armed force of 80 police in open battle. All approaches to Colombo were blocked by demonstrations or by road obstructions. All communications between Colombo and the outstations, other than radio, were cut. The capital city was cut off from the rest of the country, with the police overwhelmed by the masses. The L S S P leaders were received in triumph every where.

It was no different outside Colombo. The train and Bus services were paralysed. No lorry came through. The masses demonstrated in the streets, fought the police, compelled even hostile establishments to close down, and simply stopped all traffic by every means at their command. From Gintota in the South to Negombo and Wennapuwa in the North along the Western and South Western sea-board, from Colombo through Avissawella all the way to Ratnapura the hartal was complete and the people were triumphant. Up in the Jaffna Peninsula it was the same. Scattered points of similar up-surge dotted the country in other places.

The boastful U N P Government had been caught completely by surprise. They had prepared to fight a strike, but were met with also a hartal. They did not understand it and they did not know how to tackle it. How can a mass up-surge be tackled by a Government which had never anticipated it and also had no experience of it.

## **THE GOVERNMENT PENICS**

The capitalist U N P Government panicked. The Cabinet actually met on the 12th on board HMS "Newfoundland," a British warship

in Colombo harbour! Away in Dompe the police had already shot and killed. Another had been shot dead in Mutwal. The police were manifestly powerless. As one policeman, who shall be nameless remarked: "We are only six thousand; what can we do against eighty lakhs?" The almost insurrectionary folk of Egoda Uyana, for instance, had captured a train, driven the armed police back to their station and refused to disperse even when the military shot into their unarmed mass. At Panadura two railway wagons were set ablaze right in front of the railway station. The equally near-insurrectionary folk of Borakanda near Karadeniya had trapped the police and the Riot-Act-reading Magistrate insisting on a promise that certain previously arrested comrades of theirs should be released. In Boralesgamuwa, at the very outskirts of Colombo, a whole row of Gamini buses, trying to break the hartal, had been similarly trapped and been battered. In Dompe itself a police van was destroyed and the allegation was that the people had tried to capture the police station. In Maharagama they say there was people's raj for the day. It was not very different in Homagama, Kirillapone, Waskaduwa and Borakanda. In places like Balapitiya, Akurala, Ratgama, both police and military were strangely absent on the 12th - and the 12th was quiet in these places with the hartal complete!

The panic-stricken U N P Government called out the military, clamped down a curfew from 6 p. m. to 6 a. m., and declared a state of Emergency under the Public Security Act on the 12th afternoon itself. It was like locking the stable door after the steed had bolted. The hartal and strike, declared for only one day, was nearly over. Everything would have been reasonably quiet the following day; if only the Government was willing to allow the quiet to be restored.

But quiet was not to be. On the one hand, the movement itself had risen to such a height that it could not automatically and at once subside. On the other hand, the panic - stricken U N P Government made of the Emergency an opportunity to launch a vicious terror upon the masses. The police began to get more brutal. The military acted more blindly. The pro- U N P elements in the rural areas, who had cowered in their isolation on the 12th, emerged in their cowardice to seek a coward's revenge. They denounced to the authorities every single person they had ever known or heard to be

associated with the Samasamaja movement, especially the Samasamaja Youth Leagues. They added their private enemies and those against whom they had private grudges to their lists. And they set about procuring and providing often utterly false and fabricated evidence against the Samasamaja fighters they denounced. It was the Martial Law experience of 1915 all over again. And as if to complete the parallel, the capitalist U N P Government also announced the organisation of a so-called Home Guard and squads of so called Rural Defence Volunteers, obviously to be formed from these very elements. Ceylon has not yet forgotten the notorious Town Guard of 1915.

The Emergency regime was indeed little distinguishable from Martial Law although the Emergency Regulations were operated through the every-day courts. This was best shown by the bail regulations. These really took away the function of bailing from the courts and entrusted them virtually to the police. Certain property offences were made punishable by death. The penalties for other offences were enhanced. A new and more wide-drawn sedition law was enacted. The power of detaining persons without trial or of prohibiting and limiting the movement of persons was taken by the Executive. The right to confiscate the property of organisations and persons; these and indeed the entire paraphernalia of a police state were brought into being with rapidity that spelt panic and boded ill.

In the meantime, the 13th dawned in troubled confusion. The curfew period had fed rumour; and rumour created un-rest. In Uragaha for instance they set about blocking the road against the bus company which had been defiant on the 12th. In near-by Borakanda the people assembled in a militant mass which threatened to march to Ambalangoda to rescue their comrades, held in the police station from the previous day. In Kirillapone and Gangodawila, they fought back against the police and military, and even set a petrol lorry on fire. In Hikkaduwa they held up an armed police party for four hours, refusing to allow it to pass. And so on and so forth. The people, cut off from news and guidance from their own side, were reacting on their own.

## **THE TERROR**

The authorities took the opportunity with both hands. It is significant that as many deaths took place on the 13th as on the 12th. The police shot and killed in Uragaha on the 13th. They shot and

killed in Ratgama. They shot and killed in Hikkaduwa. The man who died in Uragaha had bared his breast to the bullet. The man who died in Ratgama had been defiant to the last. The shooting which did not result in death on the 12th and 13th are not wholly known and may never be known; but it is eloquent that the police first gave the "Times of Ceylon" a figure of 21 deaths by shooting and then withdrew it, making it only seven. Even the Prime Minister in Parliament seemed un-certain of the figure; so little apparently did the Government itself know of what had happened. The vengeance of the U N P Government also fell on the Colombo Municipal Council and the Moratuwa Urban Council that had solidarised with the hartal. These elected local bodies were suspended under the Emergency regulations, and the direct rule of the Central Government was imposed through special Commissioners.

The days and weeks which followed saw a Government which had legislated in panic use these very laws to stifle and suppress all real opposition. What with meetings and even groups of three being prohibited; what with the sales of our paper being actually prevented; what with all freedom of movement barred; no genuine opposition could truly function. Then they went at the Left press. Our print shop was raided and the presses were sealed. There was not an office of ours but was repeatedly raided. Even Party flags were taken away by a police which was often rough with intent and rude without provocation.

Now wholesale arrests began. Hundreds who had only broken the curfew technically found themselves on remand in over-crowded jails. Other hundreds were rounded up on charges without complaints and held in jails, often to be later discharged without either evidence being brought forward or the charges being seriously pressed. Houses were invaded by searching police. At Boralugoda 200 armed police not only searched the house of Comrade Robert Gunawardene M. P. but actually dug up his garden for arms and explosives that were not there. Beatings-up in police stations were of the commonest occurrence; so that people fled their homes rather than risk the terror. Away in the rural areas the police seem to have gone berserk in some places. The people in a house at Uragaha will tell you a tale of police destruction which brings sickness to the belly and anger to the head. The folk in Karandeniya publicly declare that the police burnt several



places in the village on curfew nights. Similar reports have come from elsewhere. It was indeed police raj in these places, whether it be also U N P raj or not. It is the rule of uniformed thuggery and not of even Emergency Laws.

The horror of its own Emergency regime was brought home to the capitalist UNP Government itself when a military sentry at Kirillapone bridge shot dead the un-offending Mr. Periyatamby while he was travelling in a Quickshaw. A Colombo magisterial decision brought home the ridiculousness of at least one of its Emergency laws and the sheer in-capacity of the Government's own Justice Minister to interpret the very laws he sponsored. Above all, businessmen were complaining that the Emergency and the curfew were killing their business. Even in circles which supported the U N P, the sense of the boomerang effect of the terror grew. The Capitalist U N P Government was not strenghtening itself with the terror it had unloosed. On the contrary, it was weakening itself further. The "Times of Ceylon" began to hint pretty broadly that it was time to end the Emergency.

In this situation, a slight relaxation began to show itself. The curfew was lifted. The Emergency declaration was confined to the 24 divisions of the island where the up-rising had been most severe. The bail regulations were amended. An amnesty was declared for curfew offences. The military were withdrawn.

At the same time, the political objective of the prolongation of the Emergency regime began itself to be clear. The regime was being used to stifle opposition to the capitalist U N P Government. With the L S S P in particular silenced, the Opposition was confined to Parliamentary speeches. With our press sealed and our papers thereby effectively prevented from publication, these speeches could not even find their way to the public. The capitalist press continued to be what it had always been; a purveyor of anti-Samasamajist lies instead of Samasamaja news. The demand of the party for an independent and impartial Commission of Inquiry into the shootings received no publicity. Our exposures of atrocities did not leak into the press at all. Even news of court cases was generally suppressed. The capitalist U N P Government continued its oppression under a blanket of silence imposed by the very Emergency laws it was using as an instrument of oppression.

**1818—1848—1915—AUGUST 1953**

The force and power of the blow which the people struck at the capitalist U N P Government on August 12th is plain from the above summary description of events. The U N P Government had literally challenged the people to protest against its measures if they dared. The U N P Government had also openly prepared its apparatus of repression against any attempt at answering the challenge; expecting thus to prevent the protest altogether. The only result was that, on August 12th, and outraged and angered people rose in their might, hurled the U N P Government's challenge back in its teeth, and taught it and its class associates such a lesson in politics as they are never likely to forget. As we have seen, for a time that day, in many a place, the people actually rendered the U N P Government's apparatus of repression powerless, and compelled the capitalist class to bow to the people's will. Nothing whatsoever, no subsequent repression and oppression, will erase from the people's mind the sense of mass power experienced in this way on that day. Governments will henceforth have to calculate with it. No Government can remove it.

Thus, on the 12th August, a new factor re-entered our politics. This is the factor of direct mass intervention in the political arena; itself the basic factor in the revolutionary process. Our politics hereafter can never be the same as before. The sense of mass power generated in the masses themselves as well as in their opponents ensures this.

This character of the August uprising sets the August struggle itself in a lofty setting. It sets the August movement in the tradition of 1818, 1848 and 1915. But with a difference. The class character of the August 1953 up-rising is fundamentally different from the class character of the 1818, 1848 and 1915 uprisings.

The 1818 up-rising was no doubt popular. It was a people's up-rising. But its leadership was feudal and its aim was to restore a feudal king. The up-rising looked backward and not forward.

The 1848 up-rising, though less general in its scope, was more modern in its nature. It was the violent protest of a rural people against the process of capitalist dispossession of their land. It had leaders but no leadership. The old feudalists were crushed and

powerless. No new class capable of leading the struggle and heading it towards power had yet arisen. The 1848 up-rising was consequently fore-doomed to be a mere episode and did not even become a part of the people's political consciousness and memory.

1915 was different from both 1818 and 1848. It bore the impress of the newly-formed and rising Ceylonese capitalist class. It therefore pointed to the future. But the very weakness of the new class and its lack of any clear ideology was reflected in the religious-communal form which the 1915 up-rising took. The people's clash with the British Imperialists was thereby muffled and rendered unclear. But the struggle remained in the popular consciousness as a mass struggle against the foreign rulers. It set Ceylon on the road of the struggle for national liberation.

The August 1953 up-rising is the first mass up-rising in Ceylon's history against Ceylonese capitalist rule. It is the first mass up-rising in Ceylon's history which bears the imprint of the worker-peasant alliance; the instrument of Ceylon's national liberation and social emancipation. It is the first great up-rising in Ceylon which points the way to the mass seizure of power and the emergence of the Workers and Peasants Government.

The August 1953 up-rising is also to be distinguished in an important way from the great strike struggles of the working class which Ceylon had witnessed since the Harbour strike of 1921. The August 1953 struggle was not primarily a strike struggle; although strikes were an important part of the struggle. The August 1953 struggle drew in and was carried on by a much wider mass than the working class. It drew in the predominantly rural masses who further gave it the character of an actual up-rising in the most thickly populated and politically most advanced region of the Island; namely, the Western and South-Western sea-board and a portion of its hinterland.

Due to the non-participation of the CJC leadership the vast mass of the plantation workers did not strike on August 12th, though a number of estates struck in areas where the Samasamaja movement was strong.

Anybody can see the power the August 1953 struggle would have drawn and generated if the plantation workers had come into

the struggle in their concentrated working class mass. The worker-peasant alliance would have been complete on a national scale. But the pattern of the future power-struggle is clear—as also its outcome. The August 1953 struggle is not only rooted in our past but also mirrors our future.

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

The Emergency has been lifted; but the real emergency continues. The task of replacing the capitalist UNP Government still remains to be accomplished. The struggle to compel the U N P Government to resign and hold a fresh General Election continues.

But the U N P Government has been struck a blow from which it can never fully recover. August 12th not only set it reeling but also shattered its moral basis. August 12th also narrowed its mass base irreparably.

No petty concessions can now restore that base—not even a restoration of the rice price! The abolition of the rice subsidy at one stroke also bared the capitalist class-visage of the U N P Government as if a veil had been suddenly torn. The masses can never more be deceived in to believing that this is their Government. The post-August 12th terror even more than the pre-August struggle measures have imprinted the capitalist nature of this Government in their minds and burnt it into their consciousness. They learnt for ever that the state is the state of the ruling class.

Therewith the masses have also learnt that they must rule society if they are to repair society. The state must be theirs if their wishes are to be fulfilled.

The road to the creation of their own state by the masses is the road of power and the power of the masses lies not only in their numbers but also, and very much more, in their organisation. It is not an accident that the main area of the August 12th up-rising was precisely the area in which the Samasamaja movement had functioned longest. It is also not an accident that the high - points of the struggle were also in places where the Lanka Samasamaja Party and its Samasamaja Youth Leagues were best organised. It was almost a law of the August 12th up - rising that wherever the Samasamajists were there the people rose! Indeed, the August movement as

a whole was, in many respects, a triumph of the local leaderships of the Samasamaja movement and, in this sense, a triumph of Samsamajism itself. It is obviously a task of the coming period, therefore, for the militants in town and country to join the Samasamaja movement.

The Lanka Samasamaja Party stands ready and eager to recruit and train these militants; to add to their experience of struggle the political understanding which will make them irresistible when the masses reach out for power. The Lanka Samasamaja Party brings to them its rich tradition of 18 years; its own experience of struggle; the clarity of its programme and the strength of its will to power. The Lanka Samasamaja Party calls to them as the Party of the toilers, the Party of the future; the Party under whose leadership the people of Ceylon will win the final victory—the victory which will bring them full national independence and the socialist society.

**JOIN THE SAMASAMAJA MOVEMENT!**

**FORM A SAMASAMAJA YOUTH LEAGUE IN EVERY URBAN DIVISION AND VILLAGE IN LANKA!**

**LONG LIVE THE PEOPLE'S AUGUST SPIRIT AND AUGUST TRADITION!**

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