

Recollection 1: An election petition was filed against T.B. Illangaratne after he won the by-election for Kandy electorate in 1948. The allegation against Illangaratne was that his campaign supporters had indulged in character assassination campaign against his opponent Fred E. de Silva.

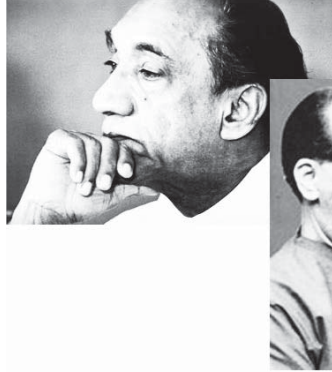
Justice Nagalingham, who heard the petition has accepted it and unseated Illangaratne nullifying the election result. Furthermore, Illangaratne's civic rights were suspended for a period of seven years.

There was nothing extraordinary in this judgement. However, there was a subsequent side effect from the court proceedings of this case. While the petition was heard, Fred E. de Silva appeared as a witness. While giving evidence he fell into a well-laid trap made by the Defence Attorney, the renowned King's Council S. Nadesan.

It was mandatory then to declare the election expenses for all the candidates and the defeated candidate Fred de Silva in his declaration failed to mention that he had paid Rs 25 to a Tamil translator Ganeshan. In the Courts, Mr Nadesan asked Mr Fred E de Silva regarding the payment of translator's fee and Mr de Silva admitted that he had not entered it in declaration of expenses.

affluent man with his coat and trouser pockets spilling with bundles of Sterling Pounds. The caption of the cartoon was 'he should keep his money out of politics'.

Recollection 3: J.R Jayewardene, the then Minister of State came to New Delhi in 1968 to lead the Sri Lanka delegation to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). His Secretary Ananda Tissa de Alwis accompanied him. When we were chatting at a reception held



Suriyaarachchi's village council area. It is not easy to defeat a popular Village Council Chairman in a parliamentary election under the present electoral system. These electorates are too small. I believe the electorates should be larger. What (S W R D) Bandaranike did was to make the electorates even smaller".

It took J R Jayewardene more than 10 years to implement what he promised in 1968 in New Delhi. In 1978, he introduced a new constitution and effectively reduced the number of electorates from 160 to mere 22 (districts). This so-called preferential voters system resulted in extra-party and inner-party conflicts, organized violence and even murders during elections.

Thus system introduced in 1959, under which the elections were held without banners, posters, cut-outs, flags and decorations

the election campaign according to the owners of bank vaults where more than seven million US dollars were found by the sleuths. The safe vaults, where the money was found belonged to the son-in-law of a leader of apolitical party.

A Sunday newspaper alleged that another party leader received millions of foreign funds for the election campaign. The newspaper said that a Sri Lankan origin businessman in Sweden has presented the party leader with US dollars equivalent of Rs 48 million.

The people who value democracy should understand the danger of this curse of foreign currency in Sri lankan elections.

From 1931 to 1977, the judiciary played a major role to curb electoral malpractices. The candidates feared to incur large scale expenses because of the fear that the courts would unseat them if the expenses are far beyond the upper limits laid under the constitution. There are many examples of the judiciary intervention from the petition against the winner of North Colombo in 1931 to unseating of Kalawana M P after the 1977 election to emphasised the strength of the democratic election system during that period. Many giants of yesteryear George E de Silva, R S S Gunawardhane, M D banda, T B Illangaratne, Dr Rathnayothi Saravanamuttu and A E Gunasinghe were among the elected members who were unseated by election petitions. Seceral elected members were unseated by the Courts because they themselves or their agents had indulge in character assassi-

Curse of Dollars, Pounds and Euros in our politics

Mr Fred E de Silva's civic rights were suspended for a period of three years for the 'crime' of failure to include the payment of Rs 25 in his election expenses declaration.

Recollection 2: I would like to refer to another incident regarding money in elections. During the 1945 general elections in the United Kingdom, an interesting cartoon appeared in a British newspaper. It showed a well dressed

in J R's honour by the High Commissioner Siri Perera Queen's Council at his residence, the WHO Regional Director Dr. Herath Gunaratne asked J.R., "Sir, why did you shifted to Colombo West electorate in 1960 instead of contesting in the traditional Kelaniya electorate?".

"If I had contested Kelaniya, I would have lost," J R quipped. "Kelaniya is R S Perera's village council area and Mahara is

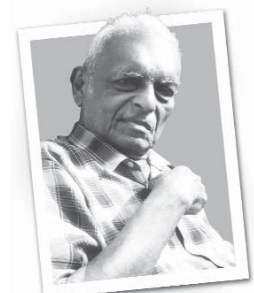
lasted until 1977 general elections. But this democratic practice ended and in 1982 Presidential election and the national Referendum show a new system of large scale propaganda war with the gang power and money power superseding over the democratic practices. Since then, all the elections in Sri Lanka from Pradeshiya Sabha to parliamentary became an arena for rich man's power play.

This has resulted in the entry of a new class of 'newly rich' into politics and most of them could throw millions of rupees for an election and most of that was black money. The ordinary candidates, who could not enter into a preferential vote fight with the 'newly rich' started to pressure their political parties for additional funds for election campaigns.

The political parties too started to look for massive funds to meet this growing demand. They looked for funds from business houses and entrepreneurs. For these donors, it was a matter of an investment for future gains. However this was limited to local funding sources until the turn of the century.

A change of the pattern was witnessed from the beginning of the 21st Century. The political parties became more interested in high value foreign funds than mere rupees from local donors.

It is no secret that a foreign country interested in 'peace' donated funds to a political party. A recently formed alliance has received a large sum of foreign currency for



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nations of their opponents during the election campaign. If that is a criteria, how many of today's elected members of parliament be able to save their seats. But they are safe because there is no provision to prevent large scale money play and mud-slinging in today's elections.

The system of elections today is orphaned because of the lack of judiciary protection, that was the parental protective umbrella existed until 1978. Unless this massive error is rectified, the democracy of Sri Lanka will be in a grave danger.

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