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Michael Colin Cooke

I am thankful to Shyamon Jayasinghe for his review of my book. Whilst I am not in total accord with his opinions, he is entitled to express them. Nevertheless the review contains a number of inaccuracies which need to be corrected.



He states that Lionel had to flee the country because of the 1971 insurrection. This

no doubt that Lionel Bopage; an engineer by profession engineered the rebellion for the JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera." This is untrue. The JVP was under siege from the United Front government at the time. Lionel was part of the fateful meeting that took place on the 2nd of April 1971, when the two factions of the party made the decision to launch the insurrection (really more a putsch). Lionel was initially sceptical but was reluctantly won over by the promises made by the Sanath-Althula faction of arms and logistics

It is true Lionel did have a troubled reception from the leaders of the Sinhalese community in Canberra. It was not because of the spectre of his terrorist background but mainly because of his support for the rights of the Tamil community with regard to economic, linguistic and social justice. This seems to have provoked a frenzy amongst certain sections of the diaspora (pages 395-408).

Mr Jayasinghe is perplexed as to why I have made the Eelam agitation part of the fabric of the book and the JVP struggle, as it was patently a 'racist movement'. The major theme of the

Making sense of Shyamon Jayasinghe's review of Rebellion, Repression and The Struggle for Justice in Sri Lanka: The Lionel Bopage Story

is incorrect. Lionel, and subsequently his family, had to flee the country during the second JVP insurrection because both the government and his former party (he had resigned from the JVP in 1984) were threatening him like tens of thousands of others at the time. He had to flee for his life (pages 370-372). He did not masquerade as anything but himself and was trying to feed himself and support his young family in Sri Lanka by working in a number of menial jobs in South Korea and Japan. At the same time he was trying unsuccessfully to obtain sanctuary in both those countries (pages 372-379).

Mr Jayasinghe goes on to state: "There is

(which did not materialise). For the prelude to the insurrection, a critique of the event and a description of the trial and jailing of Lionel and the others, see pages 139- 195 of the biography.

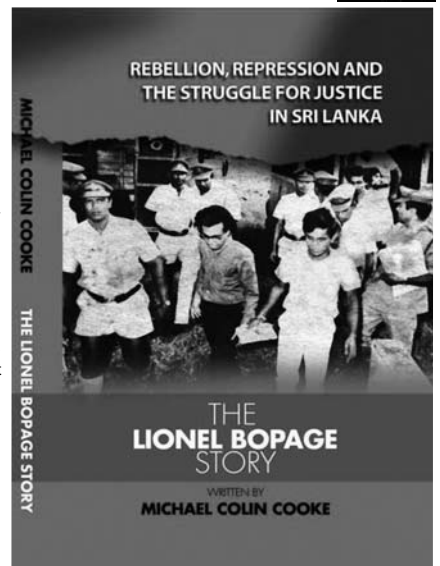
One can legitimately criticise Marxism and its version of socialism, but one cannot say that the Marxism of the JVP in the sixties was completely off the mark. Its stance on issues like the role of America was no different from that of many left-wing parties throughout the world at the time. The JVP leaders and cadres, like countless others, were in awe of the Cuban and Chinese revolutions. The JVP view is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of the book - pages 67-104.

biography is the inability of the country to deal with its multicultural heritage. Its leaders were more interested in preserving their economic and political privileges than in developing the economy. They have opportunistically played the communal card to the detriment of the inhabitants of Lanka. Intertwined with this is the story of Lionel, who saw at firsthand the effects of the 1958 riots (pages 58-63) and the 1983 pogrom (pages 237-239).

Whilst he was General Secretary of the JVP during the late seventies and early eighties he tried to develop dialogue between the disaffected youths of Sinhala and Tamil background who were suffering

similar social and political grievances (pages 229-233). One of the main reasons for his resignation from the JVP in 1984 was its opportunistic inflaming of the communal issue (pages 309-332 & 521-522). The book chronicles the many political travails he has suffered because of his position on justice and inter-communal harmony.

Lionel's political life in many ways encapsulates the political history of post-independence Lanka: both its tragedy and its hope. The biography, I hope, makes this plain to the general reader.



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