



in that crowd. Although Sajith's Mum had been seen distributing lunch packets, the crowd may possibly not have been all Sajith's flock. It was suggested that the government had also sent in its goons to create the incident. With Merv around the place and Duminda's men still roving about without a leader that is possible. Only a proper investigation can tell the truth.

Sajith has to take the entire blame for the hooliganism that was unleashed. From the point of view of his political future this isn't good for him. Looking at the results, Sajith managed to win the votes of those who overwhelmingly voted Ranil against Karu. This is very significant and it shows that despite all his anti-Ranil rhetoric many of Ranil's backers also want him to be in line for succession. A mature decision, I thought. Probably if the Working Committee knew what was to follow a different decision would have resulted.

Sajith, a graduate of the London School of Economics, definitely has a future in the Grand Old Party but he must work for that with purpose and loyalty and not stray away

## "TIE-COAT MAHATHTHURU" AND THE HOOLIGANS AT SIRIKOTHA

*One man's style must not be the rule of another's - Jane Austen*

Underlining his battle with the UNP leader, Sajith Premadasa stridently pointed out that he was waging a campaign to oust the "tie-coat mahaththuru" (tie and coat wearing-coat fraternity). Now that we know what transpired outside the UNP headquarters at Sirikotha while the Working Committee was meeting indoors we conclude that the UNP (and, by extension the country at large) is better off sticking with the "tie coat mahaththuru."

I remember in my youthful days how this emotional slogan directed against the coat and tie wearing elite became part of the propaganda package of the MEP of SWRD Bandaranaike who had himself once donned that dress but later discarded it for the National Dress in order to herald the "true-Sinhalese age" that he meant to usher in. The proverbial man-in-the street was impressed and many in his team followed suit to put on the National Dress. SWRD campaigners drew a sharp class-appeal that tallied with the anti-capitalist slogans of the Marxists in the coalition. The appeal was also associated with links to our ancient culture but this aspect is not clear because there is no recognizable universal dress-form that marked our forefathers. The appeal to our heritage stemmed from the symbolic rejection of the colonial-given heritage. The anti-tie-coat slogan joined up with the "Sanga, Guru, Veda, Govi, Kamkaru" banners to make a potent mixture for the great SWRD triumph in the epochal year 1956.

It was soon the experience of many that the full National Dress was rather inconvenient for physical movement. The Indian dhoti has a trouser-like split for the legs that facilitates physical movement. Furthermore, our boys were used to the trouser and shirt. A

variation was created by our political leaders. This was the trouser and the National top. This was justifiably nicknamed as the Kaput suit and the nickname befitted the typical political leader in our country in this era when Machiavelism grew stronger and stronger. Over the years into this day most of our politicians were noted for little other than deceitful cunning.

It was hard to put down the tie-coat combination largely because this dress became a respected formal dress for weddings, and formal meetings. Even its banning from political life could not endure for the simple reason that the echo of colonial resonance invested the Western suit with a halo of class superiority. As far as the general public was concerned it was a love-hate relationship with that Western dress.

Sajith's Dad, our famous Prime Minister R Premadasa, while adhering to a pure white National Dress, on occasion wore a simple untucked Western over the National bottom. Premadasa never evinced confidence in wearing a Western suit. Encouraged by the top man's use of the shirt other political leaders began wearing the trouser they loved along with the shirt. Sajith himself is often seen in this form of attire. Thus although the tie and coat is not there, the Western shirt sits on Sajith. Many upper class businessmen and professional men uninhibitedly went ahead with the Western suit.

In this way the importance of the dress-form is no longer felt today. Most young men and women have turned into the trouser and shirt that is commonplace in Western countries. The sarong is being put away and is now worn largely by the underclass in urban and rural areas. With

increasing exposure to global media this trend toward the Western form is bound to continue.

As far as politicians are concerned they wear all the above variations of dress. The association of class with dress is blurred today. Some upper class leaders like Karu Jayasuriya tend to opt for the National Dress at public functions. Hence Sajith's attempt to draw a sharp line between the two categories of people in terms of their dress doesn't match reality. Nor has the



Shyamon Jayasinghe

National Dress any meaning in relation to its wearer's doings. Both good and bad men wear it and the religio-cultural promises suggested by the original politicians who switched over to the National Dress have hardly been realized.

On the other hand in the eyes of the common man tie-coat mahaththuru are "respectable" and are not expected to resort to low or hooligan behaviour; although the latter are perceived as being capable of white collar crime. This expectation was perhaps realized in the Sirikotha fracas the other day when the UNP working Committee met to elect its top rank. The tie-coat mahaththuru were deliberating peacefully inside and they were able to complete the election with great transparency as admitted by defeated campaigner of Sajith's faction, Karu Jayasuriya. On the other hand, when the result was announced the anti-tie coat crowd pelleted rocks, broke the Sirikotha fence, and inflicted serious damage to the Sirikotha property. As observed in internet images there were no tie-coat mahaththuru

as he is wont to do now. A political party is not a democratic model in the classic sense although it may employ democratic processes in decision-making. It is more like a corporate commercial entity where key shareholders control interests. When one opts to join a party one must realize this and work within the game-rules by opting to persuade and push -on softly. Sajith has to be more engaged in national and global politics with which his leader is thorough. He has to learn that the world of politics is a most imperfect and even evil world. This time Sajith went about in the wrong way -too early and too intimidating. People are tired of such macho politics because they see it every day. Sajith should play an effective role as a Deputy and win hearts and minds. From the UNP point of view Ranil needs tough backers who can galvanize him and who can exploit the many opportunities thrown into the Opposition by government's own misuse. The UNP did in the past boast of a strong second ring -Lalith Athulathudimali, Gamini Dissanayake, GM Premachandra and so on. One of Prabhakaran's farsighted deeds was to destroy Sri Lanka's effective and capable leaders well in time. Persons like Sajith and Dayasiri Jayasekera should fill those slots and back their leader by addition of the fighting dimension. They cannot sit back and wait for the leader to win elections on his own as winning an election is a collective effort at all levels. The JVP has some effective fire-brands with galvanizing skills that the UNP could emulate.

This new generation of UNP leaders have a lot to learn from tie-coat mahaththuru before disposing of them.

sjturaus@optusnet.com.au