

Proper standard for a noble profession Leader of the opposition and UNP boss Ranil Wickramasinghe is no stranger to moral concepts and novel utterances, just like his uncle was once upon a time. The latter in fact stunned the whole world at a crucial international conference in St. Francisco soon after the second World War ended when he repeated the words of the Buddha extolling the value of love as against hatred in solving world problems - nahi verena verani etc. J. R. Jayewardene at that gathering received the plaudits of listeners as well as everyone who came to know about them through the media.

That was some sixty five or so years ago, but we are reminded of the great man by the recent utterances of his illustrious nephew Ranil who was addressing a much more limited audience, but his words were no doubt meant for the entire world - at least the entire conglomeration of politicians right across the globe, whatever form they made their appearance in. Addressing a meeting of members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association he set down the rules for their conduct, Zero tolerance of corruption. I am not sure of the reception or the applause he got, but I have no doubt that his admonition would have given a rude shock to those active and aspiring to be in politics.

What he preached can be taken as the bench-mark for the behavior of politicians. Sri Lankans in particular who have been exposed to every imaginable type of politician would no doubt have heaved a sigh of relief, silently telling themselves, now at last we might see politicians who can be trusted and respected, and not feared or abhorred as we had been doing all our life.

Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe earns our respect as a man who can lead the country forward with a clear vision and without the usual bribery, commissions, paybacks and victimizations, nepotism, and the innumerable forms of corruption we were subjected to. In short Sri Lankans would have started dreaming of living in a free land, and in a true democracy. They would have told themselves that now we are blessed with politicians we can look up to as role models for our children and grandchildren.

If they did dream that, will the dream come true in the foreseeable future? That is a million dollar question. Recently the Minister of Transport had declared that he was going to rid the MTD of corruption. Having seen Motor Department Inspectors certifying daughters of friends as competent drivers when they had not even seen them seated behind a wheel, I was thrilled to read the news item. Although I had never been forced into a situation where I had to part with cash to get some favour done, (I always had someone known to me to turn to) I have seen and heard of innumerable instances of corruption in that department. I hope the Minister in charge of the Customs Department too makes a similar declaration. The problem would be whether such pious declarations are going to change an established pattern in operation for generations.

I had already lost faith in the President at least as far as corruption is concerned after reading Dr. Rodrigo's explanation about that special accommodation provided to President's son at a Law College Examination, (Rodrigo is supposed to be its head). My disappointment was increased tenfold when I came to know about the cross-over of opposition MPs recently to give the government the required two third in the house. I had been living under the impression that the picture had changed from what it was when I was there and the new generation of politicians had brought some honesty in

to their life and work. What a fool I had been, going by the example of Australian politicians such as the independent member who declined an offer of a ministry offered by Julia Gillard and preferred to retain his peace of mind and quiet life as an ordinary independent MP.

I did realize that Sri Lanka is not a country with a predominant Christian culture, but a land still boasting of its pure Buddhism with leaders who pay obeisance to Buddha and his disciple day in and day out. In short, a predominantly Buddhist country, with both laymen and clergy play an active role in politics. What I learned later is that there is a strict difference between precept and practice which only a true Sri Lankan is capable of grasping and digesting. Having lived in a distant land where 'heathens' call the tune I probably had lost my instinct or whatever one calls it to understand true Buddhist values. These are apparently what both clergy and laymen back home understand and approve.

According to those values, a member of parliament is nothing but a commodity that can be bought and sold at the highest price possible. That was what happened when the government wanted to make up the numbers in order to pass its legislation. I don't think any of the monks in and out of the parliament sees anything wrong with the means adopted to obtain that majority. The commodity is up for sale to the highest bidder, in this case only bidder is the party in power which can play the price plus some plums of office too. The most recent example of this operation seems to be the injured MP assaulted by the partner in a dispute in dividing the booty received in that transaction. People in the country are used to these events which provide sufficient material for the media to write about. Such turncoats would also be taken on any foreign trip by the President.

Once we used to repeat a pithy saying, 'Join the UNP and see the world.' Now we have to change that a little to suit the current trends.

If you see a leading Buddhist monk recommending a noted crook or a thug to the President as an ideal candidate for a cabinet post, do not be shocked as long as that person is a Sri Lankan.

Having exhausted my resources in assessing the qualifications of the current party in power to meet the noble standard set by the very pious and erudite Buddhist scholar/politician Ranil Wickramasinghe, I decided to turn to the Master Preacher and his party. If and when his party comes to power can we expect to witness the ideal politician living in his dream world? He still has a chance to remain as leader for this is a man who has stunned his critics by beating the proverbial cat with his survival skills. That question can easily left out of our deliberations.

What we must now do is to look at his and his party's track record to get an idea of what can be expected under a UNP gov-

ernment. There is no other way to get a picture of tolerance of corruption that will be exercised by politicians of his government.

I have a friend who was offered an opportunity put his son into Royal College by an aunty of an infamous individual called Gonawala Sunil who apparently wielded a lot of influence when Ranil was a Minister. This was when he was the minister of education. The helpful lady told my friend that normally the operation would cost him fifty thousand rupees which was not necessary in this case. She was obliged to my friend and this was her way of repaying her debt. My friend told me that he did not want his



## ZERO TOLERANCE OF CORRUPTION

son to curse him if ever he were to discover this underhand dealing. What he did is also interesting. He went to meet the Rector of his old school, St. Joseph's College. When the Rector agreed to take his son, he made a voluntary contribution of ten thousand rupees to the College Fund. Both son and father are currently citizens of Australia, the former holding a responsible position in a reputed manufacturing establishment. My friend told me about the death of the infamous individual. According to him, when he was killed by a bomb or something similar thrown at him, another victim was 'Hal Kade Mudalali who had come to get his son admitted to the very same institution through this man. I am not sure whether the second story is true, but his personal experience can be trusted as he had no reason to lie to me.

Another friend of mine had a different experience when he was an officer of the Ministry of Industries. It was when our hero functioned as Minister of Industries. My friend had gone to the Fertilizer Manufacturing Corporation in Sapugaskanda on official business. Having finished his work he went to the chairman and requested a vehicle to go back as his official vehicle had gone back after dropping him there. The chairman in question in a man I knew well and I was not surprised when my friend reported the response he got from him.

'I am sorry Mr.....The only vehicle available was taken by Mr. Sunil.'

I saw this Mr. Sunil at the funeral of this chairman's father- In - law playing a big role. I had by that time heard of this experience. My suspicions were confirmed by the importance given to the man there. I do not want to write about Batalanda which had played a significant part in the history of Sri

Once in power, he did not stop at getting his back on a Ratwatte ( this is what he said about depriving Mrs. B. of her civic rights), he went after her son-in-law the popular film star harassing him by keeping him in jail on trumped up charges of being involved in some imaginary 'Naxalite' organization.

Lankan politics and thuggery.

All these instances stand in the way of my giving Ranil Wickramasinghe and his party delivering the goods.

His uncle J.R. preached the value of non-violence and warned the whole world



against clinging to hatred. Once in power, he did not stop at getting his back on a Ratwatte ( this is what he said about depriving Mrs. B. of her civic rights), he went after her son-in-law the popular film star harassing him by keeping him in jail on trumped up charges of being involved in some imaginary 'Naxalite' organization. Going by what the uncle did under his Just society how can one hope for zero tolerance to ever see the light of day under the nephew?

We are left with the other major political party operating on a platform for reform in order to bring in a just democratic era, which according to its leader would resemble a period of 'Dasa Raja Dharma' - the ten virtues of exemplary government.

Again one is forced to look at the track record of these saviors of the nation. It is true that they have apparently abandoned their initial standard of conduct adhering to a policy of zero tolerance of opposition even in words, (well remembered by the nation and perhaps documented too). Therefore one can safely say that Kotkawatte Saddhalassas and Premakeerthi de Alwis of the future will be spared.

I have a question though, because the JVP has never given up its Marxist policies and is still parading them to impress the masses. I have no doubt these leaders themselves are in no doubt about Marxism in practice where opposition and freedom of expression become rare commodities, leaving aside the freedom to criticize the government. In their ideal social order, no opposition will enjoy a fraction of the freedom that they are enjoying under the current 'dictatorial government.'

Will such a government be able to guarantee zero tolerance of corruption?

Who is going to bell the cat? Over to you, Mr. Wickramasinghe.

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