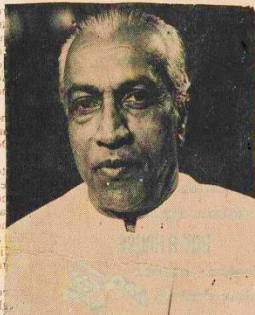


Thonda puts UNP in a soup



President DBW

The 1994 general elections have done a great service to the Tamils. Tamil politics has been quite muddled and could not take a clear direction since 1983 mainly because there were numerous parties and groups which insisted on their right to represent the Tamil people. All dialogue aimed at solving the ethnic conflict attempted since then have been among other things confounded also by the multiplicity of Tamil political opinion and ideology.

It is in this context that one has to look at the polls in the north and east first. The

most important aspect of this election therefore is that it has helped clear this confusion in Tamil politics arising from the activities of various groups.

Several Tamil groups which survived due to Indian patronage have been literally wiped out from the political scene in the north east. The TULF and the DPLF are the only Tamil parties which have been able to secure seats in the east and in the Wanni. Although the Courts and the Commissioner of Elections have held that the elections in Jaffna are not a fraud perpetrated on the northern Tamils.

it has done little to give legitimacy to the whole exercise and thereby ensure the status of Douglas Devavanda as the rightful representative of the hapless people of Jaffna.

The new government's task of finding a viable solution to the problem has thus been made easier by the '94 general election. And then this is the first time since 1977 that we have a government in power which all Tamil parties elected to parliament including the EPDP, consider capable of approaching the Tamil problem rationally. The PLOTE has said after discussions with Chandrika that they will unconditionally support her government.

The EPDP, despite the diffidence in ruling party circles, has also put out a statement in the Tamil press that it is extending its unconditional support to the PA the TULF also is inclined to take a very positive approach.

This attitude of the elected Tamil parties has mainly been determined by what was generally viewed among the minorities as the headline Sinhala nationalism of President D. B. Wijekun. The pro PA

mood, inspired by genuine or pragmatic intentions, is so strong today that Mr. Thondaman who backed the UNP despite vehement opposition within the party to the move, is determined to somehow become part of the PA government, as soon as it is possible for him to do so.

The man who helped the UNP avert political disaster at this election, is now so anxious to join hands with Chandrika, that the new strong man of the United National party, Mr. Gamini Dissanayake, might soon find himself in a tight spot as it were.

The CWC's unofficial politburo met on Saturday at Thondaman's private residence in Colombo to discuss the party's position after the elections. The opinion that the CWC should forthwith and unconditionally join the PA government had been unanimously expressed as soon as the meeting had got underway. A lone member of the group who had questioned the impolitic nature of the move in view of the CWC's credibility, had been immediately ruled out and all those present led by Mr. Thondaman had got down to discussing the modality of becoming

part of the PA government without further delay.

The group had then decided to delegate the matter to the CWC leader himself. However despite the alarm and hurry evident in the top circles of the CWC, legal opinion sought by it has not given the party any ground for concluding the deal quickly. Mr. Thondaman and his men are of the view that some clauses in the memorandum of understanding signed between the CWC and the UNP on July 6 and signed by him and D. B. will enable the CWC to join the PA government.

Article VIII of this memorandum (which was signed at that time mainly with a view to seal Mr. Sellasamy's career as a politician) says "the CWC will have control, inclusive of disciplinary matters over their respective candidates during the election; and after the election over their members in Parliament.

In the event of the CWC taking disciplinary action against a Member of Parliament resulting in the expulsion of such member from

the CWC under the provisions of the CWC constitution, the UNP shall recognise such decision and give effect to the same so that such member ceases to be MP."

Article XI (a), of the CWC-UNP memorandum says "Whilst the UNP and the CWC shall continue to act as a group in Parliament, each party will be entitled as a coalition partner

to maintain its individual party identity within and outside Parliament, and have recognition as such by the speaker, although the two parties have contested on the UNP lists, and to act separately in Parliament on any particular issue".

The CWC is sure of making use of these provisions of the memorandum to first get recognition as a separate party by the Speaker and then to get a resolution passed to that effect. This however is a very vague and uncertain procedure. And then there is another clause in the memorandum which nullifies the consequences of articles VIII and XI (a)

according to which "the CWC and the UNP shall have mutual respect for each other and shall not directly or indirectly do any act which is likely to result in the weakening of the other in its activities." (Article X) Now the CWC's decision to become part of the PA government is clearly something that can weaken the UNP in its activities.

Mr. Thondaman's anxiety to join hands with Chandrika is so great that he is ready to dismiss such matters as mere legal scruples which in his view can simply be overcome if the new government were to commit itself to his case. While being engaged in these moves to get himself into the government, Mr. Thondaman has not forgotten to request the General Secretary of the UNP to nominate Mr. P. P. Devaraj to the ministerial post in the Central Provincial Council vacated by Sathasivam who has been elected to Parliament.

The UNP has complied with his request. Mr. Thondaman's

unmitigated opportunism has landed the poor UNP in a soup as it were. The United National Party was able to secure only 44 percent of the national vote even with Mr. Thondaman's support at this general election. It would undoubtedly be doomed if the CWC succeeds in inveigling itself into the PA's good books, in the coming weeks.

The only way open for the UNP to avert disaster is to prevent the Presidential election from taking place in November by offering to cooperate with the PA to abolish the executive Presidential system of government. Many who claim to know something about hill country politics tend to attribute Mr. Thondaman's hurry to switch side, to his fear that Chandrasekera will avail himself of his position in the PA to soon overtake the CWC in the estates.

Although this is true to some extent, I think that the CWC leadership's main worry is that the new government might zealously pursue its investigations into some malpractices which took place under the previous government. Many



Thondaman

CWC leaders who are backing Mr. Thondaman to the hilt in his effort to join the PA argue that there is indeed nothing to make them in any way beholden to the UNP.

They say that the UNP never delivered any of its promises made to the CWC — the latest one being the ownership of worker housing.

These are lame and shabby excuses. The truth is that these were the persons who in the first instance had insisted that the CWC should not go it alone at the general election but that it should contest on the amalgamated UNP lists. They were scared at that time that leaving the UNP might expose them to corruption charges from the disgruntled ranks of the UNP who would have no doubt got hold of the facts about such corruption. There indeed was a time that some ill informed but honest Tamils hoped that Mr. Thondaman was the ultimate Tamil leader who had risen above all petty differences to uphold pan-Tamilian interests.

by Taraki