

# **CEYLON'S LANGUAGE PROBLEM**

By

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**EVER SINCE IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT THERE MIGHT BE A SNAP ELECTION MOST OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE BEEN MEETING FOR THE PURPOSE OF FORMULATING THEIR ELECTORAL PROGRAMMES.**

In spite of the fact that Ceylon is an under-developed country whose troubles are largely due to our national wealth being insufficient to assure to every citizen a minimum of decent existence, some of these parties seem to be more agitated about the question of national languages than vital questions relating to the development of our economy and resources. One would have thought that the policy of Government on the official languages has been made clear since the year 1943.

As early as June 27, 1943, more than 12 years ago, the State Council passed a resolution that steps should be taken to effect the transition from English to Sinhalese and Tamil with the object of making both these languages the official languages of the country. After the Soulbury Constitution was accepted most of the then Ministers and other prominent citizens under the leadership of the late Rt. Hon. D. S. Senanayake formed a new party—the U.N.P.

## **The 'D.S.' Policy**

ONE of the cardinal principles on which this Party was built and which attracted to its fold several leaders of minority communities was the assurance of equal rights and opportunities to all citizens of this country regardless of race, creed, or language.

**The late Mr. D. S. Senanayake in the course of a memorandum to the Minister of Education in 1949 stated: "Nor again should it be forgotten that our essential task is to create a nation and that our people speak not one language but two or perhaps three.**

"Language distinctions must be continued because we are not prepared as a nation to lose any part of our cultural heritage, Aryan or Dravidian, but those distinctions must be kept on a cultural plane and not be allowed to create communal distinctions in spheres where they are irrelevant. Whatever be the medium of instruction we must ensure that Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers shall be able to serve in any part of Ceylon."

### Both Languages

THEREAFTER the U.N.P. Government appointed the Official Languages Commission in 1951 on the basis that Sinhalese and Tamil would be the official languages. On January 21, 1954, the U.N.P. at its annual party conference reiterated its decision to make Sinhalese and Tamil official languages **throughout the country.**

In 1954 the Government appointed a Commission on Higher Education and when recently it was stated in the Press that the majority of this Commission had decided to submit a report on the basis that Sinhalese should be the sole official language His Excellency the Governor-General sent a communication to the Commission setting out the Government's view of the matter.

**He said : "You are no doubt aware that it is the accepted policy of Government that Sinhalese and Tamil should be the official languages of this country and any examination of this policy would be contrary to the terms of reference."**

Recently the Premier reaffirmed this policy once again in parliament.

It will thus be clear that it has been the settled policy of the U.N.P. and of the Government right from the inception of the present Constitution and of the previous Government of this country from the year 1943 that Sinhalese and Tamil should be the official languages. Whatever criticism may be made regarding the manner in which the U.N.P. Government has implemented this policy it has to be recorded that this Party has never wavered with regard to the enunciation of this policy.

### Elections

Two elections have been fought when everyone knew what the U.N.P. policy regarding official languages was. No other political party has made an issue of this question at the elections; neither have they criticised this policy during the last two election campaigns.

The N. L. S. S. P. and the C.P. have consistently supported the policy of parity for both the national languages of the country. But, after the Premier's reported statement in Jaffna that he proposed to amend the Constitution as a step in the implementation of the well established policy of Government, certain politicians and parties are seeking to make an issue of this matter.

This is, however, a question which cannot be decided by appeal to mass emotion and sentiments. It is impossible for the masses of the people of any country—with widely differing opinions, interests and standards of education—to form a judgment after a careful consideration of all relevant circumstances and in accordance with the true interests

of the country as a whole. Even University graduates whose training must enable them to study a problem dispassionately and arrive at proper conclusions are often not free from prejudices and passion in discussing national affairs.

National problems are daily becoming more and more complicated but the vast majority of people have no special training or aptitude for judging aright, and they are swayed too easily by prejudices and illusions. Besides very few people have the time and ability for clear and careful political thinking. If one remembers that a demagogue like Hitler was able to rouse the passions of the people of a civilised country like Germany and ultimately lead it to destruction, one can see that vital questions of national importance can never be solved by making emotional appeals to the people.

### Emotional Factor

THIS problem of language is closely wound up with human feelings and sentiments and it is very easy to rouse the people into taking a step in the wrong direction. No patriot worthy of the name whether in the North or in the South should be a party to exploit the weaknesses of the masses on a question such as this.

Democracy does not mean that the leaders should follow the masses. As has been observed by Bryce in his work on Democracy "Free Government cannot but be, and has in reality always been, an oligarchy within a democracy". The oligarchy is no doubt one of talent. The various political parties who are supposed to contain this talent must guide the people aright. Their duty is to decide what is good for the country as a whole and then to educate the people and persuade them to accept it.

They will prove to be traitors to the country if they find out not what is good for the country, but what cry will appeal to the masses, and then exploit that cry for the purpose of getting returned to power.

Now that it is attempted in certain quarters to unsettle the settled policy of the Government of this country that Sinhalese and Tamil should be the official languages throughout Ceylon on a basis of complete equality, and Government itself is wavering and confused with regard to the manner of implementing this policy, it is desirable to examine this problem with a view to ascertaining whether the policy proclaimed by Government is correct and if so what steps should be taken to implement this policy.

### Multi-National State

THE Premier, in the course of this recent address to the U.N.P. put his finger on the crux of the matter when he said that in any multi-racial, multi-communal, multi-religious, country democracy becomes a problem and that the objective of the people must be to evolve a strong and united Ceylonese nation.

The word nation in modern usage has been restricted to mean a people organised as a State. This is the legal concept of a nation. But there is a more important concept of a nation—the social concept, which identifies a nation as a people possessing national consciousness. **These two concepts are entirely different.**

A person may legally belong to a nation which he dislikes or which does not regard him as a loyal citizen. This very often happens in cases where an ethnic majority oppresses a minority. The history of Eastern Europe affords us examples of such cases.

Many States are composed of different nations or nationalities. Switzerland is legally one nation but it is inhabited by four different nationalities. Such States are called **multi-national States**. In multi-national States there are often one or more national minorities.

The distinctive feature of a national minority has often been stated to be “the existence of a national consciousness accompanied by linguistic and cultural differences”. In Ceylon there are today, apart from the Sinhalese majority two or perhaps three national minorities—the Tamils, the Muslims and the Burghers. The Sinhalese form nearly 70 per cent. of the population while the Burghers form about  $\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the population.

The Burghers do not form a nation in the sense of a mass of people occupying a defined geographical area. They are the descendants of the Dutch who ruled this country at one time. As they were cut away from their culturally conscious kinsmen in Holland they readily gave up their own language and studied English when it became the official language of the country. They adopted the English language for the same reason that Sinhalese and Tamils who desired to enter the Government or the Mercantile Services learnt the language. But while the Sinhalese and Tamils remained attached to their own languages the Burghers, on account of various historical factors, did not display the strong attachment to language shown by the Boers in South Africa. They are few in numbers and live in the midst of the major population of the country scattered throughout the Island. Most of them are conversant with one or more of the two national languages of the country.

The Tamils and the Muslims form the major portion of the rest of the population.

Though the majority of the Muslims live outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces their mother-tongue is Tamil. They form a distinct nationality on account of their religion and culture; but as modern States adopt a policy of freedom of conscience and religion, institutions for the guaranteeing of their special religious minority rights are unnecessary.

## Crux of Problem

‘If one regards mainly the difference in language it will be found that Ceylon is inhabited by a majority which is Sinhalese-speaking and a minority which is largely Tamil-speaking. These two groups profess different religions, and have different historical associations and cultures. This is a demographic reality which we have to face. *The problem with which we are confronted in Ceylon is a problem common to all multi-national States: that of reconciling the predominance of the majority with the liberty of the minority.*

The rule that in a democratic State the majority must decide any question has its obvious limitations. The principle of majority rule cannot apply to the rights of national minorities and there is an implied condition that the majority should not act oppressively.

If the majority passes a law in a multi-national state denying employment in the Public Service to all persons other than members of the majority nationality or refusing to recognise members of minority nationalities as citizens of the country one cannot invoke the principle of rule by majority to justify such acts.

**If in a multi-national State the principle of majority rule is made applicable to questions involving the rights of national minorities, then it will amount to the rule of the national minorities by the majority. The minorities will thus be denied their ordinary human right of self-expression and self-determination and will be subject to the tyranny of an impersonal majority, which is bound to be as galling to them as the rule of any despot. A country which is true to the democratic ideal cannot countenance the rule of its national minorities by the majority.**

It must be recognised “that democracy as a form of Government or a way of life could not become a reality unless people were permitted to determine its own modes of living: that freedom of expression would be a mockery, if persons were not free to employ the only language in which they could express themselves, that self-determination would ring hollow if men and women were compelled to conform to standards not of their own choosing.”

## The Only Answer

It is unfortunate, as the Premier said, that we are a multi-national State. It will no doubt have been simpler if this country was inhabited by one people speaking one language and belonging to one culture. Being in this unfortunate position we cannot solve our problems by suppressing the national minorities or by ignoring their rights. History will show that national movements have a habit of thriving despite

such suppression or indifference. We have to devise a method by which people belonging to different races, languages and nationalities may live peacefully within one political state.

**“Ordinary common sense will tell us that this peaceful living together will not be possible unless there is real and effective equality within the State between the majority and the minority.” The corner stone of democracy is equality.**

Both the Sinhalese and Tamil-speaking people of Ceylon have, after long years of subjection, achieved their freedom. Their languages languished under foreign rule and it is natural that they should desire to make them the official languages of the country. Any Sinhalese will desire that he should be able to transact all his business with the various Government departments and the Courts in his own language and that the proceedings of Parliament should be conducted in a language which he can understand. Every Tamil-speaking person will have a similar desire.

If there is to be a regime of real and effective equality in the country, then a method should be devised of ensuring that this legitimate desire of the Sinhalese and Tamil-speaking persons in this country is satisfied. Equality also implies equal opportunities for employment in the Public Services and that recruitment should be made on merit and on no other consideration.

**If the members of a minority nationality are to live on equal terms with the majority it will be necessary for them to have the cultural, juridical and other institutions which would help them to preserve their national consciousness, to promote their own language and culture, and to participate in the political and administrative set up of the country under the same conditions as the majority.**

If this is not done the evolution of a united Ceylonese nation will become well nigh impossible.

## II

Equality which has been described earlier as the corner stone of democracy has been recognised by the principal nations of the world as of particular importance in states with national minorities.

Before the first World War the former Austro-Hungarian Empire consisted of as many as twelve different nationalities and every national group had a right to use its own language in the Courts, the administration and in the schools. At the end of the War this Empire was carved up and an endeavour was made to give each nationality a home of its own but it was found impossible to divide the territory on the basis of “one nationality—one state”.

By the peace treaties of 1919 to 1920 a number of new states were formed and as these states had a large number of national minorities the great powers imposed by treaty upon these states certain obligations for the purpose of protecting these minorities, their languages and cultures, and safeguarding them against discrimination.

The minority rights guaranteed by these treaties were far from satisfactory for various reasons which will be referred to presently; but the treaties emphasized the principle of equality between the minority nationalities and the majority. The treaties purported to guarantee to the minorities “equality before the law”, “equality of civil and political rights” and “equal treatment and security in law and in fact.”

Emphasis has been placed on equality in respect of all aspects of national life because it was clearly understood that a member of a minority nationality had the human right to be treated on a basis of complete equality with a member of the majority nationality.

Reference has been made in certain quarters to these Minorities Treaties as providing a model for the solution of the problem of national minorities. But it has to be noted that though these treaties have emphasised the principle of equality, yet in actual fact full effect has not been given to this principle. The main difficulty was created because the allied statesmen were concerned solely in devising a scheme which would avoid or reduce to a minimum interstate frictions and prevent the oppression of minorities so that international conflicts and war may be avoided. They did not concern themselves about evolving a method of protection of minorities based on humanitarian or ethical grounds. The various states considered these treaties and the international supervision which they envisaged as derogatory to their dignity as sovereign states, and the great powers were desirous of not unduly wounding their susceptibilities. The League of Nations itself which was entrusted with the task of supervising the observance of these treaties was always anxious to prevent a minority issue resulting in conflict. It attempted to compromise and settle matters without paying much attention to the interests of the minorities. The weakness of these treaties and how they cannot serve as a model to a multi-national state which desires to solve its problems has been referred to by several writers.

## Minorities Treaties

The allied statesmen were fully aware of the necessity of safeguarding the linguistic, cultural and human rights of the national minorities who inhabited the various newly created states. If those rights were properly safeguarded it would have resulted in the preservation of each minority as a national group with a distinctive language and culture. But the allied statesmen had also an idea that notwithstanding these safeguards the minorities of a state would in course of time become merged with the majority nationality. It was to enable this to be done that the Minorities Treaties authorised the establishment of the language of the majority as an official language, and the making of its teaching compulsory in schools.

There was thus a conflict of aims in the Minorities Treaties. The reason for this conflict of aims was that the Minorities Treaties went on the basis that the newly created states of Eastern Europe were national states and not multi-national states. Their object was the establishment of a national state which would be liberal and tolerant in dealing with its minorities. **It is not surprising that this solution did not work satisfactorily because "in Eastern Europe where minorities are numerous, nationally conscious, cohesive and frequently well organised and where the prestige of minority languages and literatures (such as German and Hungarian in Rumania) is often greater than that of the majority, the national state is an imposition which must provoke resentment and strife. In Eastern Europe the tolerant national state is not enough. Large and articulate groups should be equal partners in the state rather than minorities. They should share with the majority in the maintenance of a multi-national state"** (Professor Janowsky).

Frederick Hertz referring to these peace treaties said:—

**"The minority rights guaranteed by the peace treaties were very restricted in scope and there is for instance no doubt that the measure of protection which the minorities enjoyed in the former Austrian State were greater than that afforded by the treaties."**

It will thus be seen that the provisions of the Minorities Treaties cannot afford us much assistance in solving our multi-national problems.

### Bilingualism

SOME politicians have suggested that the way to solve our linguistic problem is to make English the official language. But this is impossible today as the national language has become a symbol of the independence of a country and one of the idols of the new religion of nationalism, and people regard their language more highly than any material advantage they may gain by adopting a foreign tongue.

It is also impracticable to get the masses of this country to learn the English Language. It is significant that after more than a hundred years of British rule no more than 6.5 per cent. of the population speak English today. Besides for the full flowering of the national languages they should be made the languages of administration and the Courts so that they may gain in strength and prestige.

*As the Tamil-speaking minority cannot be suppressed or ignored and as the continuance of English as the official language is impossible, one has to consider other methods of solving this problem. There are only two known methods of ensuring equality between the majority and the minorities in a multi-national State: one is the method of bilingualism, the other that of federalism.*

The Government of this country has adopted the policy of bilingualism. Bilingualism implies that both Sinhalese and Tamil should be the official languages on a basis of complete equality in every part of the island. This means that any Sinhalese or Tamil-speaking person in any part of the Island should be able to transact his business with the Government or the Courts in his own language.

### Uni-National State

SOME critics of the present Government policy have referred to English being the official language in England despite the fact that there are national minorities like the Scots and the Welsh. This is so, not only in the case of England but also in the case of France in which French is the official language though at one time there existed in that country minorities who spoke different languages.

In this connection it has to be remembered that the problem of national minorities as of European nationalism itself, is a problem of modern times. In the middle ages the ideal was a universal church, a universal language and a universal Empire. The rise of West European uni-national states like England and France, which took place in early modern times, was possible because people had not developed an intense national consciousness. The King, jealous of his political power, wielded centralised authority and the language of the Court became in course of time the language of the country.

The assimilation of linguistic minorities in England and France was facilitated mainly by reason of the fact that the unifying influence of the King's power prevailed at a time when the people did not have any cultural consciousness to resist the forces of assimilation."

By the end of the 18th century England and France had become largely homogeneous in language and culture. In France the French Revolution also operated to stamp out differences of language because the revolutionaries set out to achieve linguistic uniformity with the slogan "that the language of a free people should be one and the same for all".

### National Consciousness

WHEN, later, the countries of Eastern Europe tried to follow the example of France and England by assimilating the minorities they signally failed as the various peoples had developed an intense national consciousness and absorption of the minorities by governmental pressure became almost impossible.

It may be noted that at the time of the French Revolution German was the official language of Switzerland but later, as a result of the growth of national consciousness, the three principal languages of the Federation were adopted as official languages.

French was the official language of Belgium for a long time. But, as a result of the intense agitation on the part of the Flemish-speaking people, Flemish was also adopted as an official language of Belgium by special Act of Parliament in 1898.

One of the principal objectives of the allied statesmen during and after the first World War was the self-determination of the national minorities of Europe.

It will thus be evident that national consciousness has been the moving force in modern history long after the West European countries developed into uni-national states. Similarly in the East also nationalism is a growth of comparatively modern times. Even in Ceylon in former days large numbers of Tamil settlers in the Sinhalese Kingdom learnt the Sinhalese language and became assimilated into the Sinhalese nation. The Sinhalese settlers in the Tamil Kingdom on the other hand became assimilated into the Tamil nation. This was possible at a time when the national consciousness of the two peoples had not fully developed.

**Since those times national consciousness has gradually increased and today after the impact of Western thought it has become a vital force transforming the entire life of Eastern nations. It is therefore not possible now to revert to the conditions which existed in England and France in early modern times or in Ceylon in the days of our good King Vijaya Bahu I.**

The amount of confused thinking which is prevalent even in high Government circles may be gauged from the fact that the Prime Minister himself, though an ardent supporter of the policy of bilingualism, considers that Ceylon could or should follow the American example.

In the course of an after dinner speech to the University graduands the Premier, having exhorted them to be Ceylonese first and last, stated: "Take the case of America, that vast reservoir of humanity where every race and religion of the world meet in one nation. But once they became citizens of America they are only Americans and they think and feel as Americans. They even speak the American language."

If the Premier, by citing the American example, intended to suggest that it is possible for the various nationalities of Ceylon to get assimilated into a Ceylonese nation with one culture and speaking one language presumably Sinhalese, it shows a lamentable lack of understanding of the meaning of nationalism.

### **America Only**

In America today there are the descendants of immigrants from practically every European country. These descendants have learnt the American language and identified themselves with the traditions of their adopted country. They do not agitate for the safeguarding of any special linguistic or cultural rights as is the case with minorities of multi-national states. America is thus a uni-national state.

**The question then arises why national cultural assimilation which is a feature of American democracy cannot take place in all multi-national states. The answer is that only individuals can be assimilated. It is not possible to assimilate conscious national communities.**

The immigrant into the U.S. was not a unit in a national community but an individual anxious to make his fortune in a new land. The labour of the immigrant was required to develop the resources of the country and any immigrant who adjusted himself rapidly to the new environment had tremendous economic opportunities. Therefore the immigrants themselves welcomed agencies of Americanisation as a means of securing economic advancement.

In the public schools the children of the Immigrant learnt the American language and imbibed the American culture. The dynamic character of the American environment completed the process of assimilation. The American parallel cannot apply to minorities who do not consist of individual immigrants but of solid masses of people who take pride in their language, history and culture.

### **India and U.S.S.R.**

ANOTHER criticism that has been levelled at the Government is that there is no reason why Sinhalese and Tamil should be the official languages of Ceylon when India has decided to adopt Hindi as the official language of India.

In the first place it must be remembered that Hindi is not the language of the majority of the people of India though it must be admitted that more people speak the Hindi language than any other language in India. India has a federal and not a unitary Constitution and the official language of the various federating units has been left to the choice of each province.

The provincial languages of which there are nearly thirteen or fourteen have been recognised by the Indian Constitution. The policy of the Indian Government is to remove all anomalies and to create linguistic provinces as has happened in the case of Andhra.

Though from a theoretical point of view the proper thing would have been to have recognised all the thirteen or fourteen languages as official languages for the Federal Government, yet it was realised that such a step was impracticable because it would have meant officials corresponding with the Federating States and the rest of the world in thirteen or fourteen languages. Accordingly Hindi was introduced as the official language of the Federation with the unanimous approval of the various federating units.



Similarly in the U.S.S.R., which has a Federal Constitution, there are several linguistic states and autonomous regions in which the local languages are the official languages. But on account of the inconvenience of making all these languages the official language Russian, has been selected for the purpose.

The analogy of U.S.S.R. or India can apply to Ceylon only after we adopt a Federal Constitution making Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages of the respective federating units. If at such a time the question should arise as to what should be the language of the Federal Government no one can reasonably say that we should follow the U.S.S.R. or the Indian example where the two countries were confronted with a multiplicity of languages.

In such an event the best example to follow will be that of Switzerland in which all three of its languages have been made official languages at the centre.

### (III)

In considering the correctness or otherwise of the policy of bilingualism which has been adopted by the present Government it has to be borne in mind that the people as such have never shown a reluctance to learn one another's language whenever they had the opportunity or the need to do so.

The majority of the Muslims whose mother-tongue is Tamil live outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces. By reason of this fact they have become largely bilingual if one means by 'bilingual' that they have a working knowledge of Sinhalese and Tamil sufficient for their needs.

Many Tamils who are living in the Sinhalese areas and Sinhalese carrying on business in the Tamil areas have a working knowledge of both languages. According to the Census Report of 1946, as against 6.5% of the population who were able to speak English, 8.8% of the population were able to speak both Sinhalese and Tamil. So Government's policy only means the recognition of a process which has gone on and which is bound to go on in an ever-increasing scale now that we are free.

As this problem is not peculiar to Ceylon, useful lessons can be learnt by studying the manner in which other multi-national countries which are wedded to democratic principles have solved their difficulties. It is for this reason that text-writers and others when considering this problem frequently refer to countries like South Africa, Switzerland, Russia, Belgium, Canada, Finland and Ireland among others. They consider that these countries have a lesson to teach us as they were multi-national and they have solved their difficulties with due regard to the democratic principle of equality.

But critics who are dissatisfied with the inevitable results of such a study seek to discount it by pointing out differences in the past history

of those countries and ours. It is obvious that it will be impossible to discover another country with a history absolutely similar to ours. Therefore these critics argue that we should solve our problems without any regard to what other democratic countries have done.

**This argument is fallacious because the past history of any country has very little to do with this question. If at a certain period of time there live side by side within the boundaries of one political state two or more nations, and if those nations adopt a particular method of solving their linguistic problems, that method cannot but have a useful lesson to us, and past history has very little to do with it. One cannot brush aside inconvenient parallels by pointing to irrelevant differences in the history of different countries.**

### South Africa

In South Africa, for example, there are two dominant nations, the Boers and the English, living within the confines of a single political state. These two nations have deprived the indigenous population of all their rights and all political power is exclusively shared by them. The problem of the indigenous population is a colonial problem involving the denial of human rights. The manner in which these two nations solved their national problem cannot but have a lesson to us which is in no way affected by the fact that there exists in South Africa a colonial problem. One cannot by merely referring to the colonial problem minimise the significance of the manner in which the Boers and English settled their differences.

In Finland there is a population of which 90% are Finnish speaking and 9% Swedish speaking. In 1919 they solved their linguistic problem. The way in which they have solved it cannot but have a useful lesson to us from which we can profit, provided we are intellectually honest. It is absurd to close our eyes to the lesson merely because at one time Sweden invaded Finland and ruled over it.

**Neither can one get rid of the significance of Canada adopting both English and French as official languages by stating that the English-speaking and French-speaking population of Canada are equal in number when the French Canadians comprise only 25% of the entire population and are in a minority in all the nine provinces of Canada except Quebec.**

### Belgium

HOWEVER inconvenient one may find the example of Belgium one cannot minimise its effect by stating that the Flemish-speaking population are equal in numbers to the Walloon French-speaking section when the census figures tell a different tale. The difficulties caused by the example of Switzerland cannot be swept away by stating that it



consists of four states speaking four languages which at one time agreed to federate on the basis that these four languages would be recognised as official languages when the stubborn facts are that it consists of 22 states, that German was the sole official language before the French Revolution and that Romansch is not even spoken by the majority of a single one of these 22 states and was recognised as an official language only in 1937. **Nationalist fervour should not blind one to facts.**

Reference has been made by some critics of Government's policy to the fact that even after nationalism became a vital factor in modern history, a number of multi-national states which recently attained their freedom have adopted one language as the official language of the country. This is no doubt true, but it will be seen that in these cases, such a course was adopted with the willing consent of the various nationalities. If a minority nationality consents to another language being adopted as the sole official language, then there is no violation of any democratic principle involved in such adoption.

### Indonesia

INDONESIA is an example of a country which by common consent has adopted as the sole official language Bhasa Indonesia which is spoken by a minority nationality. As there are in Indonesia over 200 languages and dialects it is not surprising that they chose one official language. It is impossible to carry on the administration in a large number of languages. Besides from the point of view of the different national groups, one common language will enable them to communicate their thoughts to one another freely which they cannot do if they are faced with the impossible task of learning 200 languages and dialects. The Indonesians adopted a minority's language as the official language mainly on grounds of utility.

On the other hand a country like Burma in which there are more than 100 different languages and dialects has adopted Burmese which is spoken by nearly 70% of the population as the official language. This has been done with the consent of the entire population whose leaders realised the impracticability of having a multiplicity of official languages. It will be found that in the Philippines where there are more than 10 languages English, Spanish and Taggalog have been adopted as official languages.

In considering the number of languages in a country one should not take into account a local dialect as this does not necessarily show that the people speaking it belong to a different nation.

### Both Languages

WE find however that countries which had to deal with only two languages like Finland, Belgium, South Africa, Canada and Ireland have adopted both languages as official languages. Certain critics of

Government have in their enthusiasm denied that Ireland has two official languages but this denial has not yet wrought any changes in the statute book of that country.

The only inference that can be drawn from these facts is that though theoretically equality can be ensured in a state in which there is a multiplicity of languages by recognising all the national languages of the state as official languages, yet because it is beyond the capacity of most people to learn more than two or three languages one has to take the practical step of adopting only one official language which may or may not be the language of the majority. Thus illustrations given of countries with a multiplicity of languages which have adopted one official language only emphasize the point that if there are only two languages concerned both should be adopted as official languages.

One may now examine one or two instances of countries which had to contend with only two national languages and not with a multiplicity of them.

South Africa is a country in which if one ignores the indigenous population who are not accorded any rights, one finds two nationalities, the Boers and the English. At one time these two nationalities were at war with one another. The principal cause of the Boer War was the resentment of the Boers at the attempt made by the English to Anglicise them and to displace the Dutch language. The war ended with the grant of self-government to South Africa and a South African National Convention met in 1908 for the purpose of drafting an Act constituting the South African Union. This Act was passed by the British Parliament and the Union came into being in 1910.

The language question was perhaps the most important matter with which the Convention had to deal. General Hertzog drafted the following resolution on this question for presentation to the Convention:

"In order to effect a closer Union of the Colonies represented at this Convention and in order fully to attain the object of its establishment, it is essential that both English and Dutch be recognized as the national and official languages of the Union; to be treated on a footing of equality and to possess equal freedom rights and privileges in all the various offices functions and services of whatsoever kind or nature of or administered by or under the Union; and that every appointment under the Union shall be made with due regard to the equality of the two languages, and to the right of every citizen of the Union to avail himself and to claim either language as the medium of communication between himself and any officer or servant of the Union; and that all the records, journals and proceedings of the Union legislatures as likewise all bills and laws of the Union, and all official notifications of general public importance or interest published in the gazette or otherwise shall be issued and published in both the English and the Dutch languages."

General Hertzog whilst speaking on this resolution stated that a real and lasting settlement must be based on genuine equality throughout the public services, while other speakers emphasised the fact that no unity was possible if one people laboured under a sense of inferiority.

### A Problem Solved

AFTER discussion a resolution was finally adopted which became, with minor modifications, Article 137 of the South Africa Act which reads: "Both the English and Dutch languages shall be the official languages of the Union and shall be treated on a footing of equality, possess and enjoy equal freedom, rights and privileges; all records, journals and proceedings of Parliament shall be kept in both languages and all bills, acts and notices of general public importance or interest issued by the Government of the Union shall be in both languages. In 1925 an amendment was passed providing that the word "Dutch" included Afrikaans.

A special article 145 was also included to prevent the dismissal of officers already in service. This Article reads: "The services of officers in the Public Service of any of the Colonies at the establishment of the Union shall not be dispensed with by reason of their want of knowledge of either the English or Dutch languages."

Thus South Africa has solved its national problem by means of bilingualism. The sections of the Act set out above show clearly the implications of a bilingual policy. By adopting such a policy South Africa has enabled each nationality to conserve its language and culture and at the same time to understand and appreciate the culture and language of the other. The Englishman has ceased to be dominant and the Boer has lost his sense of inferiority and both people are studying one another's language and learning to appreciate their respective cultures. This cannot but result in increasing harmony and understanding as the years go by.

### Finland Too

ANOTHER country which can be compared with Ceylon is Finland. Finland became a Republic in the year 1919 after having been under Swedish rule for a period of nearly 700 years and thereafter under Russia for over a period of 100 years. It is inhabited by 4 million people of whom 90 per cent are Finnish-speaking and 9 per cent. Swedish-speaking.

The Constitution of the Republic specifically provides that both Finnish and Swedish shall be the official languages of the country despite the fact that Swedish is spoken by only 9 per cent. of the population. This 9 per cent. are the descendants of the one time invaders of the country. The present position in Finland is clearly set out in an article in the *Times Educational Supplement* of the 24th December 1954 under the heading "Two Tongues For A Small Nation."

The following extract from this article may prove interesting :—

"The curriculum of secondary schools resemble that of ours in many ways but there is no early specialization and the teachings of languages presents difficulties of its own.

**"Having been under Swedish rule from 1150 to 1809 A.D., and then under Russian, Finland is now a Republic inhabited by 4 million people of whom about 9 per cent. are Swedish speaking. As a result there are two official languages. This arrangement is considered fair, but it is certainly costly and complicated."**

"The Swedish speaking members of Parliament deliver their speeches in Swedish and these are then translated into Finnish by official interpreters. Swedish schools are established in districts where most of the inhabitants are Swedish speaking as on the West Coast around Turku. Streets are named in both languages and a Finnish Telephone Directory is a bilingual puzzle to the visitor.

"The Finnish language which is pleasing to the ear resembles no other language spoken in Europe. The stress is on the first syllable and the pronunciation is almost phonetic. One is told that once you master the structure of Finnish it is not difficult any more—but its 16 cases seem a rather considerable obstacle.

### No Differentiation

"In every Finnish secondary school Swedish is taught from the first year up to and including the Matriculation. In Swedish schools in Finland the language of instruction is Swedish, but here Finnish must be taught throughout the school and is included in the Matriculation syllabus. In their second or third year the pupils begin either English or German—there is a marked preference for English. Two or three years later another foreign language must be chosen and some schools offer a third non-compulsory language."

Finland thus affords us an inspiring example of how a unitary state, in which the overwhelming majority of the population speaks the Finnish language, has considered it fair that absolutely equal treatment should be accorded to the national minority speaking the Swedish language.

**It will thus be clear that the Government of this country in enunciating its policy as the equal recognition of both Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages, has acted in accordance with well established democratic principles and healthy precedents, and with due regard to fundamental human rights.**

## IV

BILINGUALISM, which is the accepted policy of our Government, is a satisfactory method of solving our language problem. Some of our politicians however have taken the curious view that Sinhalese will disappear in course of time if both Sinhalese and Tamil are made official languages as the latter is more highly developed than the former. This attitude shows a lack of faith in Sinhalese nationalism. It pre-supposes that the Sinhalese people will give up their rich heritage in exchange for a better developed language. English has been the sole official language of this country for over 100 years but the Sinhalese people have not abandoned their own language. The Boers have not given up Afrikaans in favour of English which is more highly developed. The Flemish-speaking section of Belgium has not adopted Walloon French. National consciousness sees in the national language a symbol of the personality of the nation and a common bond of the people.

## Federal Solution

THE pride of the Sinhalese people in their ancient history and their language and their faith in their future cannot but make them cultivate their language and preserve it to be handed down to posterity as a cherished possession.

**But if one concedes for the purpose of argument that, as a result of adopting the bilingual policy, the Sinhalese language will die, then the only way in which we can solve our linguistic problems is by adopting the only other method known to a democratic state, that is the method of National Federalism.**

If the method of National Federalism is adopted it will mean that there will be two Provincial Governments in one of which the official language will be Tamil and in the other Sinhalese and at the centre both languages will be the official languages of the Federation. In this event employees of the Provincial Government will know either Sinhalese or Tamil but the employees of the Central Government will have to be proficient in both languages.

National Federalism has been satisfactorily adopted in a small country like Switzerland and in recent times in a large Communist State like the U.S.S.R.

## Swiss Example

THE Swiss State is a Confederation of 22 Cantons with a population of nearly  $4\frac{1}{2}$  millions. The German-speaking population form nearly 72 per cent. of the population, the French-speaking 20 per cent, the Italian-speaking 6 per cent. and the Romansch-speaking 1 per cent.

Within 14 of the 22 Cantons German is spoken by the overwhelming majority of the population while 3 Cantons are French-speaking

and one Canton is Italian-speaking. The other four Cantons have a mixed population. Romansch is spoken in only two Cantons in one by 1% of the population of that Canton and in another by 30.9% of the population of that Canton. German, French and Italian (and since 1937 Romansch also) are recognised as official languages in relations with the Central Government. The individual Cantons also have assured equality of language in cases where the population is sufficiently mixed, Valais, Fribourg and Berne have made German and French as official languages. In the Grisons, German, Italian and Romansch are official languages.

Until the end of the 18th century Switzerland was a Germanic country with German as its sole official language and the Germanic rulers discouraged all languages except German.

It was as a result of the influence of the French Revolution that Switzerland became a multi-national state. In 1802, in a communication to the Swiss Cantons, Napoleon said: "Nature has predestined you to become a Federal State; no wise man can wish to conquer nature." He also directed that a "Federal Organisation be set up in which every Canton would enjoy a scheme of Government adapted to its language, its religion, its customs, its interests and its opinions."

After the fall of Napoleon an attempt was made to restore German which was the language of the majority, to its earlier position as the sole official language, but this attempt did not succeed. When the Swiss Federal Constitution was adopted in 1848 one of the articles provided that "The three principal languages spoken in Switzerland—German, French and Italian—are national languages of the Confederation". And Article 116 of the present Swiss Constitution contains a similar provision.

Article 107 provides that in electing the members of the Federal Judiciary "Parliament shall see to it that the three languages are represented therein". In 1937 Romansch which is spoken in one Canton by 1 per cent. of the population of Switzerland was also recognised as a national language. The Swiss people have thus achieved organic unity despite linguistic and cultural diversity.

**This achievement has been attributed to their intense loyalty to the democratic ideal. Despotic governments do not care for human rights or the self-expression of the individual. But democracy values liberty and equality and respects fundamental human rights. The Swiss people solved the problem by recognising that "A three-language people must form a three-language state in which no nationality shall be considered more than the others."**

## U.S.S.R.

ANOTHER country which has solved the problem of a multi-national state by means of National federalism is the U.S.S.R. Russia in the times of the Czars comprised not one nation but a large number of nations spread over two continents speaking different languages and at different stages of civilisation.

The ideal of the Czarist regime was one Czar, one faith, one Russia. In accordance with this ideal the Czars proceeded to Russify the non-Russian population of Russia which was divided into various linguistic groups. The use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in schools situated in non-Russian areas was prohibited and strenuous efforts were made to supplant the local languages. This naturally created resentment and disaffection against the Government. All resistance to the policy of Russification was sternly repressed.

In 1917 the Czarist Empire disappeared and the Bolsheviks took power. At this time there were in Russia 182 distinct nationalities speaking 149 different languages and one would have expected the Bolsheviks, faced as they were with the stupendous problem of numerous nationalities to overlook all national differences and impose the language of the majority on the whole country with a view to speeding up the task of national reconstruction.

But they chose to respect the cultural individuality of the various peoples. The existence of national differences was a demographic reality. "One cannot refuse to recognise what is", said Lenin. "One is forced to recognise it".

"The Bolsheviks realised that favouring one people over another, slighting the language or cultural attainment of any group recognising a dominant nationality, even if warranted by numbers and influence would stir up resentments and foment national strife, thus hindering the attainment of class solidarity. National sensibilities must therefore be taken into account. If one belongs to the dominant people one should repudiate all privileges enjoyed by this group".

In accordance with this policy the Bolshevik leaders issued a proclamation to the Moslems of Russia: "Henceforth your belief and customs, your national and cultural institutions, are free and inviolable. Build your national life freely and unhindered. You have a right to do so".

The same principle was applied to all the peoples of the Soviet Union and a Federal Union was formed which ensured to all the nationalities the preservation of their respective national languages as the official languages of the federating units. But, on account of the multiplicity of these languages, Russian has been adopted as a compulsory second language by the various federal units and is used in the Supreme Soviet by way of convenience.

## Complete Equality

Two Chambers were constituted, one the Chamber of Deputies and the other the Chamber of Nationalities, each with equal powers. In the Chamber of Nationalities each of the federating units had equal representation, irrespective of their population, while other nationalities who have autonomous regions are also represented thus ensuring equality between the majority and the national minorities. **Soviet National Federalism thus recognises national differences and encourages the national languages, institutions and customs. It acknowledges the fact that the composite character of the population should be reflected in the State on a basis of complete equality and it grants a wide latitude in regional self-government.**

Article 123 of the present Russian Constitution guarantees "equal rights and opportunities to all citizens irrespective of their nationality or race" and this provision has been fully observed in every department of life in the Soviet Union. In fact, discrimination or privilege on the ground of race or nationality is a penal offence. What is more, every people with a distinct language and a territory on which it is concentrated and the desire to maintain its cultural identity is recognised as a nationality.

The Soviets also have realised that national equality was meaningless unless an effort was made to raise the standard of life of the more backward peoples so that disparities between the different nationalities might be removed and accordingly very much larger sums than the population warrants have been spent in the backward areas and the rate of development of those areas has been far greater than that of the Russian republic. Whatever differences of opinion there may be with regard to the achievements of Soviet Communism there can be no doubt that the Bolshevik leaders have solved the problem of national minorities in a statesman-like manner.

**These two examples will serve to show that national federalism is another satisfactory method of solving our problems without detriment to the rights of the different nationalities inhabiting this country.**

The Government of this country however has adopted the policy of bilingualism. Where it has failed is in implementing this policy. It appears to be confused and wavering with regard to the steps that should be taken to carry out its policy. It is this wavering that has caused disquiet in the minds of the Tamil-speaking people and has encouraged Sinhalese chauvinism to come out into the open with a view to changing the policy itself.

### **In Both Languages**

It should be realised that bilingualism necessarily implies that **every single public officer in this country should have an adequate knowledge of both languages so that he may be able to take up employment in any part of the Island, and that all citizens should have equal opportunities of entering the Public Services.**

To enable this to be done the necessary changes must be made in the educational system so that those who aspire to the Public Services may acquire an adequate knowledge of both the official languages. It is not necessary for those who do not desire to join the public services to learn both languages.

Proceedings in Parliament must be in both the official languages and adequate provision must be made for interpretation from one language to another. Laws and all Government Publications must be in both languages. In areas where there are no mixed populations local government and the minor courts may be carried on in the language spoken by the people of the area with a system of interpretation to enable any person speaking the other language to conduct his business.

All public notices, name boards, letter heads of Public Departments and invitations issued by Government for public functions must be in both languages. At present this is not done. It is these small matters which strike the eye of the ordinary man and give him the impression that Government is not serious in implementing its policy of parity to both languages. Immediate steps should be taken to rectify this.

Another matter of importance is the amendment of the Constitution.

**It is worthy of note that in most multi-national states the necessary constitutional provision has been made so that the question of languages may be taken out of the region of party politics and strife.**

In the South African Constitution the provision regarding languages is one of those matters in respect of which no amendment is possible unless agreed to by at least two-thirds of the members of both Houses of Parliament. In this connection the following observations made by Thomas G. Masaryk, the founder of the Czechoslovakian Republic, may be of interest :—

“As soon as one admits the rights of the human person the individual, one admits also his rights to his own language (mother tongue); that is a matter of course in uni-national states, but in multi-national states the official recognition of languages is a matter of national contest and the right to language must be recognised and codified”.

In the present context in Ceylon when doubts are sought to be raised with regard to the correctness of Government's language policy it will be wise to put the matter beyond all controversy by amending the Constitution.

### **Essential Step**

An essential step towards this goal is to convince the Sinhalese people that such an amendment will not do any injustice to their language or to their national aspirations. Therefore the stand taken by the Prime Minister and by leaders of two of the left parties of seeking to convince the Sinhalese people of the justice of having two official languages is both courageous and correct.

It is a pity that at such a moment, with the notable exception of the Prime Minister, other members of the ruling party — both Ministers and prominent members like Mr. Dudley Senanayake have not thought it necessary to convince the Sinhalese people of the correctness of their policy. Whatever disagreements one may have had with the late Mr. D. S. Senanayake it was well known that he did not shirk to defend and convince people of the correctness of the policies he espoused even when passions were inflamed against them as on the Flag issue.

On the language question, we find this spirit in the present Prime Minister. It is however necessary that every single member of the ruling party, and all progressive elements in the country should be imbued with the same spirit and stand firm in the defence of the policy of parity for both the national languages.

Creating a so-called ‘United Front of Tamils’ on this issue is not going to help to have the Constitution amended, but, on the contrary will make the task of doing so more difficult. The representatives of all electorates which are predominantly Tamil-speaking are for parity of both languages irrespective of the political party to which they belong. Therefore there is no need to convince the Tamil-speaking people of the justice of parity. So what is the purpose that is served by making this an election issue or by inflaming communal passions? What the Tamil people need today are leaders who refuse to be stooges of any party, selfless men of character and integrity who can win the respect and friendship of the Sinhalese people and thus help those progressive elements in the country who are seeking to convince the Sinhalese people of the justice of parity.

### **Place of English**

No reference has been made in this article to the place of English once Sinhalese and Tamil become the official languages of the country.

The position of English during the transitional period before Sinhalese and Tamil become official languages, is a totally different question to that of whether Sinhalese and Tamil should be made the official languages of the country on a basis of complete equality or not.

There are thus only two ways of solving the multi-national problem we are faced with, by means of bilingualism or federalism. The adoption of either policy and its successful implementation is not possible without the co-operation of the various nationalities which inhabit this country.

**From a practical point of view it should not be difficult to work out a satisfactory policy provided the leaders of the country are prepared to subordinate their personal and party interests to the interests of the country as a whole.**

After all, language is an instrument of civilisation and not a weapon of domination and considerations of prestige should not be allowed to prevail over the dictates of plain common sense. This problem can never be solved in an atmosphere of distrust or by veiled efforts by one nationality to dominate over others.

The main difficulty of safeguarding the legitimate interests of national minorities arises from the fact that the State today controls practically the entire life of the country and thus has several opportunities of discriminating. The solution to the problem demands that both the majority and minority nationalities should approach the matter in a spirit of understanding and tolerance and with respect for human rights.

## A NOTE ON THE POPULATION STATISTICS OF CEYLON

The following paragraphs from Sessional Paper XXII of 1946 which sets out the recommendations of the Select Committee consisting of J. R. Jayawardene (Chairman), J. H. B. Nihill, C. W. W. Kan-nangara, T. B. Jayah, S. Natesan and A. Ratnaike show what according to them was the linguistic distribution of the population of Ceylon as shown in the census report of 1946.

"18. The population of Ceylon according to the census of 1946 was 6,658,999. This figure includes local residents enumerated with the services.

"19. The Table below shows the racial distribution of the population :—

<i>Race</i>	<i>Population to the nearest 1,000</i>	<i>Percentage to total population</i>
Sinhalese (Low-Country and Kandyans)	4,637,000	69.6
Ceylon Tamil	826,000	12.4
Ceylon Moors and Malays	393,000	5.9
Indian Tamils	682,000	10.3
Other Indians (including Indian Moors)	69,000	1.0
Other Races	52,000	0.8

**"20. The Sinhalese, except a few thousands who speak Tamil in the Western and North-Western Provinces generally speak Sinhalese. The Ceylon and Indian Tamils and the Muslims are, in general, Tamil-speaking. The proportion according to language may therefore be reckoned as 69.6% Sinhalese-speaking and 28.6% Tamil-speaking."**

According to the 1953 census the population has been classified into two categories, citizens and non-citizens. The entirety of the Indian population of this country, notwithstanding the fact that a number of them are citizens by descent, others are citizens by registration, and applications for registration are still pending, has been classified in the Census Report as non-citizens. One would have expected the Census Department at least to concern itself with facts and not with politics.

The following are the population figures according to the census of 1953 :—

Total population — 8,098,637

<i>Citizens</i>		<i>Non-citizens</i>	
Sinhalese	... 5,621,332	Indians	... 983,304
Ceylon Tamils	... 908,705	Pakistanis	... 5,749
Ceylon Moors	... 468,146	Europeans	... 6,909
Malays	... 28,736	Others	... 11,162
Burghers	... 43,916		
Others	... 20,678		

Even if one excludes the entirety of the "Indians" from the category of citizens, as has been done without any justification by the Census Department, one finds that the Tamil-speaking population of Ceylon comprising of the Ceylon Moors and the Ceylon Tamils is 1,376,851 as against a Sinhalese speaking population of 5,621,332. The inclusion of the Ceylon Moors as Tamil speaking is justified by facts. Besides the Select Committee presided over by Mr. J. R. Jayawardene classified them as Tamil speaking in 1946. Nothing revolutionary has happened in the last nine years to change the linguistic character of the Ceylon Moor population.

If one takes into account only the "Citizens" as classified in the Census Report, 79.2% of the population are Sinhalese-speaking as against 19.4% who are Tamil-speaking. If one, however, takes the entire population of the Island into consideration it will be found that the Sinhalese-speaking population comprises about 70% as against the Tamil-speaking population of about 29%.



