

CORRUPTION VS MORALITY

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Government is power. According to Lord Acton, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The State Council, our first legislative body elected on the adult franchise, was cognisant of this fact and promptly and firmly dealt with cases of corruption and by so doing acquired imperishable renown for integrity.

But the governments that followed were neither prompt nor firm in stamping out corruption. In fact the successive regimes have shown utter callousness to the infamous deals in trawlers, pepper, livestock, the deliberate evasions of audit queries and a host of other frauds.

Quite a number of post-independence political leaders have entered into political bargaining by blackmailing corrupt politicians. The ensuing confrontation with the corrupt individual is in this wise. "If you support my motion I shall throw a wet blanket over your bribery. If you don't, I shall appoint a commission to investigate it, and the upshot will be the end of your political career," says the political leader.

Thus, personal interests have taken precedence over national interests.

The following excerpts from the Bauddha Peramuna of 16th June 1962 reveal the nature and extent of this evil.

The vast expenditure incurred by our governments since we gained our political freedom on land development, agriculture and irrigation would have been enough to make our country self sufficient in the matter of food. But we still live a ship-to-mouth existence.

The untold millions spent on our fisheries would have been enough not only to provide the whole country with its requirements but even to supply foreign markets. All the same, the import of dry fish has brought shame on all concerned.

Similarly the colossal funds expended on our hospitals, schools, offices, houses, roads and bridges would have been enough to remedy the following deficiencies:

- * Lack of beds for hospital patients*
- * Lack of schools for school-less children*
- * Lack of accommodation for offices*
- * Lack of housing facilities*
- * Lack of transport facilities*

The waste of funds on industries tells the same story.

The reason is this. The bulk of the funds earmarked by the Government for purposes of national development pass into the Bank Accounts of VIPs who are in the Government or outside it.

Even in other countries, there is bribery and misappropriation of public funds. But there is no place like Ceylon where corrupt individuals are honoured as heroes of high society.

Persons who have issued dud cheques for Rs. 10/= or who have been expelled from night clubs for non-payment of liquor bills have got into political parties and manoeuvred to obtain lucrative jobs or else they have successfully contested elections and manoeuvred to become Ministers or Junior Ministers. Before long they move about in limousine cars, live in ease and comfort in luxurious mansions, purchase tea or rubber estates, soon their depleted bank accounts begin to soar and sometimes they hold funds even in foreign banks.

How can a person who has been in receipt of a monthly salary of no more than Rs. 75 or who had to mortgage all his property to meet his election expenses suddenly acquire immense wealth? Of course by taking bribes in one form or another.

The greatest fraud of recent times is the Telephone Racket. The poor telephone service we now get is entirely due to the obsolete equipment. The wrong numbers, the inflated bills, the faulty connections, the overhearing of others' conversations, and the exasperating delays in obtaining calls, all these can be attributed to the outmoded system. A close investigation will show that the obsolete equipment we now use has been given up even by some of the countries that have their own factories to produce it.

Recently when the new Telephone Exchange in Colombo was started we had an excellent opportunity of introducing into our country the most up-to-date system now in vogue in the world. But that was not to be, for certain officials in the Telecommunication Department and the Ministry of Transport, Works and Posts did not want to call for worldwide tenders. Instead they got the Minister to sign a hush-hush agreement with U.K. Firms to saddle the country for another half a century at least with an outmoded and obsolete system.

Although this hush-hush agreement entailed a heavy loss to the State, nevertheless it proved a great boon to quite a number of private individuals.

The following issues merit investigation:

1. Were there underhand deals after the Contract was through?
2. Did not a Department Official get a high post in the local firm, which represents the Foreign Firms that supply the equipment, and was not a Ministry Official's father-in-law a director of the local firm?

3. Was not a part of the bribe that the VIP accepted in sterling transferred to a Ceylon man in London and thereafter when the Ceylon man who called on a VIP domiciled in London to repay a loan, was he not asked by the latter as to how he managed to find the money?
4. Did not another country, which has specialised in modern telephone systems and gone far ahead of U.K. in this technique, make an offer of a better telephone system to the Ceylon Government on more favourable terms? Why was this offer not even considered?

The Buddhist Opinion of April-May 1961 exposed this racket and asked for an independent commission of inquiry and I brought the matter to the personal notice of the Prime Minister on 5th June 1961. But strange to say, far from ordering an inquiry, she did not even acknowledge the receipt of my letter.

Once a VIP who wanted to build up a sterling balance in London negotiated with several foreign organisations to rent out a house in Colombo 7 on condition that payment is made in U.K. This was a direct violation of exchange regulations.

Is it a fact that commissions for big contracts are paid by the contractors into foreign banks, especially Swiss Banks, where the identity of depositors is never divulged, possibly to enable the recipient, if defeated at the polls, to settle down abroad? In certain cases, this is made quite easy, because the bribe paid is in the shape of a chateau. Not only foreign contractors make a point of paying the commission into foreign banks, but even local industrialists remit moneys into foreign banks in the shape of birthday presents.

If a business magnate gives a two-lakhs diamond necklace to the right person as a birthday present in the hope of stopping the nationalisation of his business concern, is it to be called a bribe or just a birthday gift. Similarly, if the lucky persons who have got permits for new industries give a magnificent array of gifts of enormous value to the right person on his wedding day, are they to be called bribes or just wedding gifts?

As regards the allocation of new industries to the private sector, I stated recently, *a careful scrutiny of the persons who actually control these industries shows how anti-national and anti-Buddhist elements and particularly those who have purchased their citizenship with big money have got a stranglehold on the industries in this country. For example, the manufacture of textiles to clothe the people of this country has been given almost entirely to registered citizens, distinguished citizens and other anti-nationals.*

Buddhists have not even been afforded the courtesy of acknowledgment to industrial proposals made by them. People with no love for this country have been enabled to send out millions of rupees on inflated invoices for the machinery on new machinery invoices. Cost of production is thus artificially inflated to start with. This corruption is one of the main reasons

for the increase in the cost of living and the drain on our foreign assets.

We know that if the right person builds a house, one firm supplies all the building materials, another firm all the fittings, a third the labour freely supervised by Government Overseers, and yet another provides him with a Benz Car. So the right person comes to possess a palace even beyond the dreams of a Maharajah. This type of cultivation has now spread to other parts of the country as well.

Another type of corruption is smuggling by VIPs. If a VIP arrives at an airport a fleet of vans proceeds right up to the plane to receive the heavy packages or boxes containing various commodities brought from overseas and transport them direct to the VIP's residence, thus evading customs duties.

Yet another type of corruption is illegal tapping of telephone conversations. Lanka Dipa of 9th July 1964 reports evidence of Mr. Felix Dias Bandaranaike to the effect that tape records of such telephone conversations were played before no less a person than the Prime Minister herself.

A serious statement on the bribery of politicians by Mr. Hugh Fernando, the ex-Speaker, appears in the Lanka Dipa of 2.3.1965. He says that his last official act as Speaker of the House of Representatives was to sign the papers to sanction the investigation by the Bribery Commission into allegations of bribery against a Minister and an M.P. However the authorities took no action. Lo and behold, these two persons are now nominated by the SLFP as candidates for the forthcoming General Election.

Already, the Bribery Commission has found prima facie evidence against hundreds of persons. But no action has yet been filed against any one of them. About two years ago, our judges pointed out certain flaws in the existing bribery law. So far nothing has been done to rectify these flaws and bring the bribe-takers to book. For example, in 1962 two officers serving in the Post and Telecommunication Stores were caught by the C.I.D. while in the very act of accepting a bribe of Rs.800/=. But nothing has been done. The two officers are still working in the same place. On the other hand, we remember a case of a prominent M.P. who had been found guilty of bribery by the Thalgodapitiya Bribery Commission adorning an International Conference in Canada as a representative of Ceylon.

It is a crying shame that some Bhikkus who want totalitarian Marxism are trying hard to get citizenship rights to illicit immigrants who are under orders to quit. The reason is better imagined than described.

The C.W.E. has now become a den of thieves. Some of its employees are among the earliest to queue up to buy scarce articles like wristlet watches, Thermos flasks etc. at the authorised price. Having bought the articles, they rush headlong to a Nadar in the Black Market to re-sell them at a big profit. This is how the C.W.E. feeds the Black Market.

To keep pace with the consequent deterioration of moral standards, the factories started at Gal Oya and Kantalai to make sugar are now

manufacturing out of the molasses Gal Oya arrack, rum and brandy, and out of a People's Bank loan of 41/2 millions a new beer factory is installed.

Moreover Sravasti, once the abode of a revered philanthropist, is today a cesspool of vice.

These things got to show that an atmosphere of immorality and contempt for the law is fast growing in this country.

May the State be righteous! This is our ideal. Morality is the foundation of the State. People of this country have been taught to accept and maintain this best-tested tradition of thought and action handed down from old times.

But Marxists want to subvert the forces and traditions of our society, in order to create chaos and establish totalitarianism.

The toddy torrent proposal was their first move to shake the foundations of our morality. There was a fear that it would be followed up by licensed houses, because the ardent supporters of the toddy torrent proposal practised the morality of the poultry yard. Now we have the Marxist leader's repeated orders to his 'boys' to stone cars conveying voters. Stoning cars develops into stoning the Maha Sangha, stoning the crowds, hurling abuse and assaults. These things inevitably lead to social unrest, civil war. This is the seventh heaven of totalitarian Marxists. Their attempts were foiled for thirty years. Will they succeed now?

The morality given to our people by the Buddha Dhamma cannot easily be wiped out. Nemesis of corruption, nepotism and immorality is already at work. You may be sure that what is right will ultimately triumph. Therefore it is the paramount duty of the voters to ponder over the following teaching of the Buddha and give their votes to candidates who are on the side of morality and not to those who are on the side of corruption, and immorality, to whichever democratic party they may belong. I have more information to give on the subject referred to above. But I shall reserve it for a future occasion.

If ever the ruler is corrupt, then the Ministers become corrupt. If the Ministers become corrupt then the officials become corrupt. If the officials become corrupt, then the people become corrupt.

If ever the ruler is virtuous, then the Ministers become virtuous. If the Ministers become virtuous then the officials become virtuous. If the officials become virtuous, then the people become virtuous.