

3 January 1953

Dear Mr. Esmond Wickremasinghe,

I thank you most sincerely for the trouble you have taken in replying to my letter at some length. I wrote to you, because I have always felt that the late Mr. D. R. Wijewardene founded his news-papers to pursue the interests of the ~~native~~ nation and that we value them as our national news-papers.

I fully appreciate the importance of covering "all matters of news of interest to readers". But it is doubtful whether there is any news value in such glaring headlines and statements and such innuendos under pseudonyms and cartoons based on lies as I am specifically referring to below.

Glaring headlines and statements.

Mr. N. S. Walter though a new comer to Ceylon denounced the move to give an important place to the national languages and the Daily News published his speech under sensational headlines; "Emotional phrases cloud issues in logical arguments". Hon. Mr. E. F. N. Gratiaen who is well-known as one who despises our way of life branded the exponents of swabhasa as "fanatic". And his speech was captioned "Foolish doctrines of 'Fanatic' deplored".

A familiar ruse adopted by Lake House promoters of anti-swabhasa propaganda is to display misleading headlines to caption news reports of public meetings or functions. The Daily News of 26th December 1952 carried such a misleading report. The sound observations made by so responsible a citizen as Sir Vythilingam Doraisamy supporting the swabhasa-medium were deliberately passed over and an incorrect statement by an opponent of swabhasa headline the news.

Innuendos under pseudonyms and cartoons based on lies

Recently, my point of ~~new~~ view in the matter of switch-over to swabhasa was powerfully supported in a letter to the Daily News by Rev. Fr. Quintus Perera, Principal of St. Sebastian's College, Madampe. The day after, an innuendo by Sardonyx appeared in the same paper on Dec. 20th under the caption, "Blue Ribbon". I enclose a cutting of it. The reaction it produced on one who is a stranger to me - a Burgher gentleman by the way - is thus stated in a letter he has addressed to me on 26th December 1952: Dear Mr. Mettananda, I hope you will excuse my informal manner of address. I have been following your lone fight against the missionaries to introduce the Swabhasa in our schools that I write to say how much I appreciate your stand in this matter. You might remember seeing that letter by the Rev. Fr. Quintus Perera supporting you. I wrote to him and he has replied to me now. I am sending you a copy of my letter to him and his reply to me: kindly return them to me please. I do not know whether you saw an attempt by the Daily News to show that the letter from Fr. Quintus Perera was a sort of forgery. I enclose the cutting, in case you have not seen it: this appeared on p. 12 on the 20th December. How that Fr. Perera has replied to me, there is no doubt that he is the author of the letter."

Surely, comment is needless. Those responsible for this innuendo violated the high ethical code of world's reputed news-papers by divulging particulars relating to a correspondent's signed article. The instance of a cartoon based on a lie which I am going to cite is already known to you. In March last year, we had our annual O. B. A. Dinner at which the 'Observer' reported was present by invitation. I have no doubt that he gave the correct news of the Dinner to his newspaper. I have reason to believe that the news was doctored in the office. Although at our Dinner, as on the previous occasions there were no alcoholic liquors served and no ball-room dabbling, the Daily News carried the news of this function as a "Dinner Dance" - which was a lie. And a couple of days later a cartoon appeared in the Observer based on this lie showing me as

as the central figure in an orgy of drinking and dancing, closing my eyes and plugging my ~~my~~ ears - pregnant with sinister suggestions. Thanks to your interventions, a correction of the false news, approved by me, appeared in your papers and I let the matter drop. Subsequently newspapers such as the "Catholic Messenger" which had copied the false news from the Daily News also published the correction and expressed regret.

Discrimination.

A policy to provide a forum for the expression of all points of view subject, of course, to the discretion vested in an Editor is certainly a laudable one.

But the following instances will show that the newspapers which I always regard as pursuing the interests of the nation have ignored the contributions of those who urge the national point of view and on the contrary given undue prominence to those who oppose the national point of view.

Some time ago, I handed in for the publication in the Daily News a typescript prepared by me by way of reviewing the White Paper on education entitled "Loopholes in the Education White Paper". This was not published, but a few days after a feature article appeared attacking my point of view. As the Daily News did not publish my article, I had it published ~~pub~~ in the Times. After that, too, several of my letters on educational problems which were of current interest were not published. I must, however, be deeply grateful for the courtesy sometimes extended to me. I can give several instances to show how educationists who stand for the national point of view are given short shift. A couple of days after Canon de Saram's Memorandum to the Official Language Commission was published in the Ceylon Observer in August last, a point of view different from Canon de Saram was given by Rev. Induruwe Pannatissa, M.A. Member, Central Advisory Council of Education and Educational Publications Board in a letter to the same paper. This letter was withheld for 5 weeks. What happened was that it was forwarded to Canon de Saram for his comments. After five weeks Canon de Saram's comments were published along with a mutilated version of Rev. Pannatissa's letter, the portions of the letter not commented on by Canon de Saram being deliberately deleted although they were exceedingly important.

My memorandum to the same Commission was also published in the Observer. Soon after several ~~xxx~~ letters appeared criticising my point of view. But those letters were not forwarded to me to be revived by me so that my reviews might be published along with the critic's letters, as was done in the case of Canon de Saram's Memorandum. This is, sure, discrimination.

I was recently asked by a Staff Officer of the Observer to write a review of the World Bank Mission Report's observations on our Education. I did so. But it was not published, perhaps because I stressed the evidence it contained in support of the swabhasa medium. ~~xxxx~~ Instead, a feature article by H.C.N. de Lenerolle attacked my point of view without giving my name and making no specific reference to my review of the World Bank Mission Report. Mr. Lenerolle's article was criticised by Mr. Panagoda, Principal of Museum Training College in a letter which was not published. On the contrary, Mr. Lenerolle's caustic comments on the letter appeared without the letter.

This is what Rev. Fr. Quintus Perera who is a protagonist of swabhasa writes: "Now to come to my interview with the Editor.

When I introduced myself as a champion of swabhasa he smiled sarcastically and said "So you think differently from Fr. Peter Pillai." I said yes. He ~~xxx~~ asked for my letter. He said that it was too long, that he would have to prune it a lot and publish it only after about 2 or 3 weeks as there was no space available. He published it the day after, mind you! He further added that 'Mr. Mettananda too has sent some thing.' I said 'it is an article'. He mockingly said that he would not publish it as an article but only as a letter. His whole ~~xxxx~~
 Note the remark in the News

His whole tone smacked of ridicule. Note the remark in the news column of D.N. on the blue ribbon etc.

Here is the experience of a lecturer of the Education Department of Ceylon ~~xxxxx~~ University, M.A. in Education (London). He "sent a communication on the mother ~~xxxxx~~ tongue medium to be published in D.N. It was not published. When questioned, the Editor had replied that he hadn't received such a communication; he had asked him to send a second copy. That too was sent but was not published. He ~~was~~ questioned again. He was told that the communication has been misplaced."

Not merely local opponents of our national language and our national culture are given undue prominence, but even foreign visitors who speak disparagingly about them. Here is an instance to prove this. Recently, the Observer carried a feature article by the Foreign Relation Officer of a local Embassy virtually belittling our language.

I doubt whether with such discrimination it is possible to provide a forum for the expression of all points of view. Forgive me for saying that when a forum is provided for the expression of all points of view on a momentous national question, responsible writers are expected to send their contributions under their own names.

Letters "cooked up" by Staff Members.

But letters couched in scurrilous language written by anonymous scribes with a view to pouring ridicule on those who hold the opposite point of view should not be tolerated in such a forum. I am afraid there is a general opinion that letters of this description are often produced by Staff Members themselves and published under pen names. This practice unfortunately detracts from the high prestige of the newspapers concerned. It is commendable that you have confidence in one who has been connected with your great organisation since 1918. May I point out that to work so long under the control of the late Mr.D.R.Wijewardena, the ardent patriot imbued with the highest of national ideals, is one thing and to work free from that healthy control and with absolute discretionary power is another.

These instances go to prove that those responsible for the ~~xxx~~ editing of the Daily News and Observer appear to promote not the national point of view but that of the denationalised section of our population, which is barely 1%.

Moral Deterioration

The kind of stuff that appears on Women's page would have shocked the late Mr.D.R.Wijewardene who was so keen on our women following our characteristic way of life rather than run after sex-thrills and sex-excitements. Quite a number of public spirited persons agree with me that the contents of the Women's Page include suggestive descriptions and suggestive pictures, calculated to corrupt young women's morals. And I have heard it said that this kind of thing has already contributed to the deterioration of morals among our young people.

I am writing these facts for your information, as I realize the tremendous power for good the national newspapers which you control can become by assiduously pursuing the ideals so ably set up by the late Mr. D.R.Wijewardena.

Yours sincerely,