

NOVEMBER

BUDDHIST TIMES

Registered as a Newspaper

Vol. 5 No. 7

Unduvap 2550

November 2006

Rs. 30.00

The Vision & Mission of Mr. L.H. Mettananda (1894-1967)

From (1956) The 2500th Buddha Jayanthi to (2006) The 2550th Buddha Jayanthi

By The Centre for Buddhist Action

The 39th Death Anniversary of an illustrious Sinhala Buddhist patriot the late Mr. L.H. Mettananda which fell on 1st November 2006, was commemorated with a book launch "Letters of Mettananda" which was held at the Museum Auditorium recently. The mere fact that the auditorium was almost packed to capacity, is adequate evidence to the deep impressions of reverence some Sinhalese still have for the late Mr. Mettananda.

This article will not delve into the illustrious life of Mr. Mettananda as an educationist but will concentrate on his "mission in life" which



was to bring about "a Buddhist Way of Life" to Sri Lanka as he called it, and whether it has been achieved. It is worthwhile for us to look back at his life, what he fought for and whether the situation of discrimination against the Sinhala Buddhists is any different today, from what it was during his lifetime. Although many governments have changed since, amazingly enough, the pro-western, pro-Christian agendas are as strong today during the 2550th Buddha Jayanthi Year as it was during 1956 when the 2500th Buddha Jayanthi was celebrated. We may say, that it is even more subtle, but far more complex today and that the Sinhala Buddhist voice "has been virtually shut" but that "Catholic Action" combined with the new Evangelical onslaught originating from USA and other western countries, is ruling the day in Sri Lanka.

Amidst Sinhala Buddhists, the late Mr. Mettananda was a highly revered personality and amidst Christians, he was an anathema - feared but respected. When he passed away on 1st November 1967 even his adversaries, could not but pay their respects to a man who stood firm for the rightful place he wished to gain for the Sinhala Buddhists of this

country. "The Catholic Messenger" of 11th November 1967 carried an article on his death titled "Death of a Buddhist Leader" in which it was stated: "A few days ago, Buddhists of our country mourned the passing away of a leader who was a crusader for the cause of Buddhism. As a pedagogue, he had mothered Ananda for long years and as a guru, he moulded the mores of students who entered it and built it up to its present stature. While registering our loss of a national leader of his calibre, we cannot but recall the occasions we disagreed with him and entered at times into an almost acrimonious verbal duel when we failed to see eye to eye with him on certain issues. But we respected the candour with which he expressed what he considered were grievances. Mgr. W.L.A. Don Peter, Rector St. Joseph's College paid his last respects to the late leader on behalf of the Archdiocese. The Messenger extends to the members of the bereaved family and the Buddhists of our country our sincere condolences".

His Untiring Fight to Get the Rightful Place for the Sinhala Buddhist Way of Life

As a Sinhala Buddhist as well as an educationist, he clearly saw the shortcomings within the system of education at the time where pro-western leaders were happy to continue in the path of the legacy left behind by the British. Our independence gained in 1948, was only in name, since we still had a Governor whose oath of allegiance was to the Queen of England. In spite of the fact that the majority of this country were Sinhala Buddhists, Christians and the Christian way of life continued to be preferred by our leaders. The late Mr. Mettananda realised that Buddhists had to put pressure on the prevailing UNP government of the late D.S.Senanayake to demand that the majority religion and culture must be given pride of place and that our country must be governed according "to the Buddhist way of life." In order to do this, a request was made to appoint a committee to investigate into the discrimination against Buddhists in this country. Although the late D.S. Senanayake agreed to do it initially, two days later he

informed them that according to legal advice received by him, such a committee would contravene the law of the time! According to him our leaders at the time, were physically in this country but "their thinking was foreign." When his attempt failed, then he left no stones unturned to organise at grassroots, a drastic change at the 1956 elections where the late Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and S.L.F.P. won a landslide victory with the support of the Pancha Maha Balavegaya.

However, the late Mr. Mettananda was not satisfied with "cosmetic & superficial" changes towards the Sinhala Buddhists or the Maha Sangha. At the ceremony held at Ananada College on 4th February 1956, to offer the "Buddhist Commission Report" to the Maha Sangha, Mr. Mettananda states thus: "A great noise is being made by our Government that much is being done for Buddhism. The Dalada Maligawa is to be provided with a new wing, Mahiyangana is to be restored, the Pattirippuwa and Magula Maduwa are to be given to the Buddhists. The Tripitaka is being translated into Sinhalese. A Buddhist Encyclopedia is being compiled. These are no

doubt very good things, but I ask you "Will the restoration of old buildings help to revive the Buddhist Way of Life?" The translation of the Tripitaka and the compilation of a Buddhist Encyclopedia are good things, but will they alone help to revive the Buddhist Way of Life? The Buddhists are being given buildings and books; but what does the Government do for the Roman Catholic? To them a sacrifice is made of the Buddhist children. The Government subsidises the Christian Organisations almost to the extent of fifty million rupees annually to pervert and denationalise our children. In their Church schools, our sick are being handed over to Roman Catholic Nursing Sisters who are pledged to propagate their faith and extend the dominion of the Pope. Colombo Hospital is under their control. Recently the Government spent 7 _ lakhs for a home for the Roman Catholic Nursing Sisters at Bogambara Hill in Kandy. The cross that surmounts their chapel built by



Mr. L.H.Mettananda

the Government is seen above the pinnacle that surmounts the Dalada Maligawa! Kandy Hospital is being handed over to them. Within the next few years, other big hospitals will be handed over to them. Again, large sums of money are being given by the Government to Christian Organisations for the care of orphans, the aged, the deaf, the dumb and the blind. The large majority of the inmates of these institutions are born Buddhists who are being converted to Christianity with the aid of the subsidy given by a people's Government!"