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ASPECTS OF BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS CEYLON
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BRITISH
PARLIAMENTARY ATTITUDES, 1917-1931

by

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SUMMARY

This thesis seeks to explore parliamentary attitudes towards, and the parliamentary impact on, political, economic, and social developments in Ceylon. Chapter I has been arranged to examine the feasibility of parliamentary intervention in the administration of Ceylon. Thus the powers of the Governor of Ceylon and the officials at the Colonial Office have been explained and the way in which these powers and the efforts of the Colonial Office to keep a common front with the Governor could stand in the way of parliamentary wishes. Parliamentary interest in colonial affairs increased, especially in the period after the First World War, and in the case of Ceylon this interest was strengthened by Ceylon's important economic position among Crown colonies and the Ceylonese leaders' political relations with British parliamentarians. Because of this special interest some parliamentarians paid attention to defects in the policy of the officials both at the Colonial Office and in Ceylon and influenced the British Government to change the Colonial Office policy of keeping Ceylon behind India in constitutional advance. A special emphasis has been laid on the British Labour Party's theory of gradualism since the Labour parliamentarians were led by this theory to take up the Ceylon constitutional question in Parliament and thereby helped the Ceylonese constitutional movement in many ways.

Chapters II, III, and IV trace the main features of British economic policy in Ceylon during the years 1917-31 while emphasizing parliamentary attitudes on the matter. As far as these three chapters are concerned three broad conclusions have been reached. The first is that parliamentary policy towards Ceylon was consistent with that of the officials at the Colonial Office. It has been argued that the British Labour Party represented an altruistic colonial economic policy at least until the introduction of the Colonial Development Bill in 1929 when the party to some extent reconciled its colonial economic policy with that of the Conservative Party. The second conclusion suggested is that parliamentarians had less interest in peasant agriculture in Ceylon than they had in the Ceylon planting industry. The third conclusion put forward is that the Ceylonese political leaders together with the officials in Ceylon strengthened the illusion held by the Colonial Office and the parliamentarians that the planting industry resulted

in general material and intellectual development in Ceylon. From these conclusions a generalization has been made that the polarization of plantation and peasant agriculture sectors remained unchanged during the period under discussion.

In Chapter III it has been argued that the officials both in Ceylon and at the Colonial Office and the Ceylon planters shared almost the same view on the question of Indian immigration to Ceylon and that the Conservative parliamentarians supported this view, whereas the Labour parliamentarians adopted an essentially pro-immigrant attitude and supported the Indian Government's outlook on the matter.

Chapter V has been arranged so as to demonstrate the involvement of the Westernized political leadership in Ceylon in plantation agriculture and to show the extent to which they had been anglicised by British social and economic policies. As far as economic and social background was concerned the collaborators and the constitutionalists can easily be differentiated from the radicals.

In the last chapter ties between the Ceylonese leaders and British parliamentarians have been examined. The major purpose of this chapter is to show how these ties made the Ceylonese constitutionalists in their agitation for constitutional reforms more and more vociferous against the officials both in Ceylon and at the Colonial Office and how these ties effectively discouraged the Ceylonese radicals from becoming revolutionaries. The final contention of this chapter is that ties between the Ceylonese leaders and British parliamentarians assisted the formation of a strong group of Ceylonese politicians who firmly believed in the British parliamentary system.