

In Defence of Wimal

I would not have written this article if not for the comments made in the Sunday English language newspapers and by some political opponents of Sinhala nation and Sinhala nationalism. For some of these “celebrated” authors who have made a name among the English newspaper readers Wimal Weerawansa was at best a joke. They claimed that the fast had a script written by Wimal himself or somebody close to the government and it was not a fast but a farce. One learned person went on to say that Wimal was uneducated and by that she probably meant that Wimal Weerawansa had not proceeded beyond the Advanced Level class. These commentators were telling us that everybody knew that Wimal was not going to die and was waiting for the President to come with orange juice or *thambili* water. I am not sure whether the act of the daughter of Wimal Weerawansa was also in the script as I have not been able to get a copy of it. There were other pundits who were reminding us that UN could not be moved by street demonstrations and only civilised diplomacy could change the attitude of the United Nations secretary Ban Ki-moon (We now know how to spell this Korean name in English and thank God for it). The JVP went on to announce at a press conference that the appointment of the so called advisory panel by Ki-moon had been mentioned in a joint statement made by the General, I mean the secretary general and not the other general, and the government of Sri Lanka.

Wimal Weerawansa is not one of my favourite personalities and I do not rate him as a good politician, and I suppose the feelings are mutual. Like most of the others in the nationalist movement or the *Jathika Vyaparaya* he has not acknowledged my contribution to the movement and he never invites me for his various activities. However, I have known him for nearly twenty years from the time he wrote to *Lakmina* the newspaper I edited unofficially, though Sunil Madhava who had JVP inclinations at that time was the official editor. Wimal was known as Wimalasiri Gamlath those days and if I remember correct he used to draw cartoons for the weekly tabloid. Ironically three cabinet ministers in the present government contributed to that paper, Dallas Alahapperuma and Champika Ranawaka being the other two. Even twenty years ago I and a few others associated with the newspaper were for the military operations against the LTTE and at that time the JVP of which Wimal Weerawansa was a member, and Champika were opposed to the so called war. The opposition was so much intense that members of the JVP and others questioned as to why I, a war monger, wrote the editorials when Sunil Madhava was the official editor. Finally I was unceremoniously relieved of my duties as the unofficial editor (I did not ask even for an allowance for my editorials and other editorial work) and I had to leave the paper which unfortunately did not last long. Soon after, I was relieved of my duties at the University of Colombo making me the sole unemployed Ph.D. holder in the country for ten years.

However, over the years most of those who opposed me at *Lakmina* have come to the position I held in the early nineties and I am glad about it though they may claim that they took up the present position on their own. I am not bothered about these recognitions as I am now old enough to realise that they do not matter much, and not at all once one has gone over to the other world. In any event the national movement now has a good middle order, meaning those who have reached the middle age, though we may not have

a corresponding increase among the young people. I am sure that Wimal Weerawansa by his fast attracted many young people to the national movement, and we in the movement should be thankful to him at least for that. The present younger generation being the children of JRJ open economy without nationalism cannot be given nationalistic feelings through newspaper articles or lectures as they are immune to those media. I have experienced this in the university and the students whom I met after my long sojourn were different from the previous generations. However, they can be politically motivated but unfortunately only the JVP has been successful even in a limited way in this regard. Wimal Weerawansa's fast is not a farce and whether he has realised it or not many a young people would have been politically motivated by his mediation. Already somebody, I am not sure of his age, has staged a one day fast in protest of the appointment of the notorious panel. This is something that the above mentioned educated people would not understand and I would be happy if they continue to enjoy their blissful educated ignorance.

We do not need these educated people to tell us that Wimal Weerawansa was not going to die as a result of the fast. With or without his daughter telephoning *Mahinda Mama* it was only a matter of time before the President would intervene to stop the fast. In any event this was not the first fast in the world to end without a death and we have seen so many fasts in this country and abroad where the "hero did not die". Fasts have different purposes other than winning the demands involved with the fast which could be understood by uneducated people such as me. (I do not believe in certificates and I am prepared to accept that I am not educated). When Mahatma Gandhi staged number of fasts it is very unlikely that the Indian independence movement would have allowed him to die as a result of the fasts. The fasts staged by the Federal Party (Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchchi or the Lanka Tamil State Party) in the fifties and the sixties would not have ended with the death of the leaders of the party as its present leader Sambandan could testify. Those fasts had the objective of inciting the ordinary Tamil people against the Sinhallas, and in spite of the so called non violence tag, they were intended to invite violence. I am not comparing Wimal Weerawansa to the leaders of the violent Tamil politics who engaged in such politics in the guise of non violence or to Mahatma Gandhi but fasts have different objectives than winning the immediate demands.

The educated, especially the English educated people who think that they are eloquent and good at delicate diplomacy, whatever it means, could convince Ban Ki-moon to withdraw the panel that has been appointed are mistaken. The power does not come from the mouths of a few sophisticated people that the English education has produced but from the people. Yes the power is with the uneducated people led by politicians like Wimal who themselves may be uneducated. In any event what is the education that these so called educated people talk of? It is simply a training that they have got from their masters and the mistresses in London, New York and Paris and such other places. I went to a school where the motto was "learn or depart" but I neither learnt nor departed and I have not "succeeded" in life. At the university I did not learn anything that was not found in the books written by the westerners and the university was only able to find a wife for me and give me a certificate though I did not obtain that "grand" certificate given by the Chancellor at the convocation either in presence or in absentia. The convocation

procession is not even a fancy dress parade as far as I am concerned, as it is a parade of young and old people who have been given cloaks of Judaic Christian culture to imprison their spiritual heritage under the cloaks. The academics in Sri Lanka are in general sales representatives, who distribute knowledge created in the west, and they are no better than those who sell “Anchor” “pitikiri” produced in New Zealand to the public in Sri Lanka.

This story on education has another side. How many private sector bosses could not proceed beyond the ordinary level class? Of course these people are not considered to be uneducated and no cartoonist would portray any one of them as an ignoramus. They are supposed to have leadership qualities having played for the school. It reminds me that Wimal has played cricket for Kalutara Vidyalaya and opened batting for the school. It is ironical for the private sector bosses to claim that the PRESENT DAY graduates are not fit to be employed by them. The lack of “quality” between the present day graduates and the older graduates is not to be found in the area of the knowledge in their respective fields. In fact I know that the present day students in Mathematics and Physics have a better knowledge, of course, of that created in the west than I had when I was a student. The difference is that they are in general not posh as their predecessors in general and they may not know to wear the tie and hold a glass of champagne properly. All these are summarised nicely by Kumar David (we hold diametrically opposite views these days though we were members of the same parties not so long ago) in his column to the Lakbimanews last Sunday. ‘In 1970 Mrs B made HAdeS (Gunasekera) permanent secretary planning, and my uncle (one Mr. Andrew Joseph) claims he approached the urbane Gamini (Corea), his predecessor in the post, and gently inquired: “I say Gamini, what is the most important quality to succeed at this level?” The answer came pat but broke his heart; poor HAdeS could manage neither. “Oh HAde S, you’ve got to learn to hold a glass of champagne, and how to lay the French Ambassador’s wife!” ’.

I do not know of Wimal’s capabilities but he is certainly not acceptable to the class of the commentators and they talk of decent diplomacy instead of taking the issues to the streets. G L Peiris is not an uneducated person, who does not know decency according to this class of people, as shown by him when he sacked me, somebody who has never been interested in wearing ties and shoes not to mention holding champagne glasses or going close to ambassadors or their wives, for teaching Jathika Chinthanya at the University of Colombo. However, he could not produce goods with his decent diplomacy and he was a complete failure in his discussions with Hilary Clinton during his recent visit to US. Perhaps as Kumar says both HAdeS and GL fail in the important tests mentioned above, and they could not achieve much.

The JVP is only propagating untruth true to their policies and the appointment of the panel is not the result of any agreement between the government and the UN. The critics want to know whether Ban Ki-moon would withdraw the panel of advisers, which is not worth a window panel. How can he withdraw it when he did not appoint the panel? Ban Ki-moon is only a paid loyal servant of US and UK and we know that he will not be ordered to withdraw the panel by these powers as an immediate response to the fast. However, the powers concerned would have got the message, and more importantly the issue has been taken to the streets from the living rooms and bedrooms of the diplomats

and the rustic Sinhala nation, and not the sophisticated alien nation will back the “uneducated” Wimal to the hilt.