

We are moving forward...

Rukman Senanayake

Mr Rukman Senanayake – the leader of the Eksath Lanka Janatha Pakshaya is the nephew of the late Mr. Dudley Senanayake, twice Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. After the death of his uncle in 1972 he entered the Parliament by winning his uncle's seat in a by election. Some years later he was thrown out of the UNP and formed his own party. After 1987 he was widely known for his consistent opposition to the Indo-Lanka Accord and his sympathetic attitude towards the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna.

E.R. What is the economic philosophy of the ELJP?

R.S. The ELJP advocates a mixed economy in which the Government sector and the private sector will go hand in hand. But it must be an economy which helps the people of the country. If the money doesn't go down to the people all things we do will become fruitless. The result will be widespread dissatisfaction which will give rise to all sorts of upheavals.

In this country the majority of the people are living off the land. So agriculture must be given priority. Therefore the private sector has a major role to play. Private sector does not mean the big companies only. It also includes small scale production and marketing. So the theory that the private sector is always exploitative is not very accurate. Of course there is an element which is harmful, like the middleman who exploits both sides – the consumer and the producer.

So we advocate an economy based on agriculture. Where more and more incentives are given to the producer and where emphasis is laid on the distribution of goods and services.

E.R. What are the differences and similarities between the economic policies of Mr. Dudley Senanayake's UNP and the economic policies followed by the UNP under ex. President Mr. J. R. Jayawardena and also the current policies of President Mr. Pre-

madasa? How have the economic policies of the UNP changed during this time period?

R.S. Mr. J. R. Jayawardena's time was a completely different era. He wanted to turn Sri Lanka into a Mini Singapore. The whole country was geared to an import-export economy. One cannot supplant another country's economic policies here Resources vary. Singapore has chose what suits them. We must choose what suits us. But Mr. Dudley Senanayake gave priority to agriculture and agro based industries. I think the present government of President Premadasa is trying to do the same thing.

The President has done a fantastic job in one year's time. He took over the country when it was in shambles in every way. Within a year he has restored normalcy and he has taken the arm chair politician right to the village. He's also helping the needy with programmes like Janasaviya. This is similar to the earlier UNP policies. The economic policy of President Premadasa is really the further development of the economic policies of Mr. Dudley Senanayake.

E.R. But both Mr. Dudley Senanayake and Mr. J. R. Jayawardena advocated free market and open economic policies.

R.S. It wasn't just an open economy. Mr. Jayawardena threw the local industries to the wolves. What is the use of having Free Trade Zones and getting

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foreigners to come if we can only supply labour and they get paid only a pittance. Of course under his system some people make a lot of money, a new rich emerged – but the majority of the people suffered. Their living standards deteriorated. Can this be called development? The major difference therefore is that before the Jayawardena era the Government tried to look after the majority, to raise their living standards.

E.R. Are you against an open economy? The experience of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was that closed economies don't work.

R.S. I think that an open economic policy is necessary. You can't have a closed economy. But there are a number of fiscal measures that can be adopted to arrange it in a way which is suitable to our country. We may have to liberalize some more. But we should have a regulated open economy. It must be regulated in such a manner that it benefits the people.

E.R. Capitalism with a human face?

R.S. Well I don't know. As I said, we advocate a mixed economy with multiple forms of ownership – that is a public sector, a private sector and a co-operative sector. These should sometimes compete with each other, sometimes supplement each other, depending on what is beneficial to the people. The criteria is what is good for the majority of the people. Whatever economic system one may adopt, if it can't improve the living standards of the people, that system will fail.

E.R. You said earlier that the economic policies of President Premadasa are actually a more developed variant of Mr. Dudley Senanayake's economic policies. The ELJP is committed to the principles and policies of Mr. Dudley Senanayake. Therefore what is the difference between the UNP of today and the ELJP?

R.S. There's hardly any difference. In fact we have, as a party, decided to support the Government completely. The present President has done and is doing all the things the ELJP would have done if we formed our own government. Let's take some major issues like getting the Indian Army out of Sri Lanka. Then about corruption – singlehandedly he is trying to take his own people to task. That's a very courageous thing to do. It's a great achievement. It's a crime to oppose a man who can do that kind of thing. Then he has abolished the M.P.'s letter system which kept out the deserving and gave party stooges an unfair leverage so really there are no major differences between us.

E.R. I can name two areas in which the policies of the UNP and the ELJP will differ. One would be the solution to the ethnic problem. For example what would the ELJP say about the Provincial Councils and the removal of the 6th amendment. This is one area. The other area would be the stand on the JVP. The ELJP has been sympathetic towards and supportive of the JVP.

R.S. We are not against Provincial Councils. What we are against is the present system of the ad-hoc power structures which eats into the administration. We are completely for self government. There are no two words about this. We feel that Members of Parliament as well as members elected from the local authorities these areas should be brought together to form the provincial Council.

Then let's take the 6th amendment. I don't think legislation introduced in the Parliament can prevent people from thinking of Eelam. It was a fruitless exercise, like the conversion to Sinhala in 24 hours. The causes for Eelam must be removed. Then only will people stop thinking of Eelam. I think the present President is trying to do that. So whether the 6th Amendment is removed or not is immaterial. After all a political party

we advocate a mixed economy with multiple forms of ownership – that is a public sector, a private sector and a co-operative sector.

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