

**CONFLICT IN
CINDERELLA'S KITCHEN**

in action, inaction and reaction. Conflict is both response and reflex and it can be born of fear, of envy, of deprivation, of a moral stance or an immoral attitude. It is found in opinion and dissent and, above all, it exists like some inner being in society. It surfaces in argument and debate and strikes wild chords in social disruption.

Conflict is a burr on a nation's conscience, for it denounces by its very existence, the make-up of a country's policies, politics and social framework.

In Sri Lanka's plantations, it becomes increasingly worrying, for there will always be those blows and counter-blows. The fear is always there: a dark awareness that resides in the soul; tear of that sudden explosion of hate that blossoms because of the nourishment provided it.

In this predominantly Buddhist country, one would expect to see and rejoice in the way of the Buddha. This essential "rightness" is told us in the Buddha's own sermon, the *Attadanda Sutta*:

"Fear results from resorting to violence – just look at how people quarrel and fight. But let me tell you now of the kind of dismay and terror I have felt.

“Seeing people struggling like fish writhing in shallow water, with enmity against one another, I became afraid.

“At one time I had wanted to find some place where I could take shelter, but I never saw such a place. There is nothing in this world that is solid at base and not a part of it that is changeless,

“I had seen them all trapped in mutual conflict and that is why I had felt so repelled. But then I noticed something buried deep in their hearts – it was – I could just make it out – a dart.”

Sri Lanka's Cinderella

On August 15, 1996, a Presidential Committee set up to investigate into and make appropriate recommendations on the socio-cultural problems of the plantation community, with special focus on plantation youth, submitted its report.

This Committee comprised Professor S.T. Hettige who holds the Chair of Sociology, University of Colombo; Mr. Sunimal Fernando, Deputy Secretary-General, I.R.E.D., and Mr. K. Marimuttu, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Media, Tourism and Aviation. Serving as co-ordinator was Mr. C.D. Cyril Gunapala, Additional Secretary to the President.

The Committee's report carried the strongest emphasis on the many socio-cultural problems of the estate workers, their employment and under-employment; the perennial disadvantage of not being in possession of National Identity Cards; their issues of citizenship, housing, water and sanitation, health care and basic amenities. The Committee recommended that a Co-ordinating and Monitoring Division be set up under the President and that such Division becomes functional by end-1998.

By February 2000, it was realized with some dismay that the