

POLITICS OF THE CEYLON NATIONAL CONGRESS 1900 - 1930

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Several aspects of the Ceylon national Congress have already been examined by K.M. de Silva and P.V.J. Jayasekera. Based on the developments that followed the riots of 1915, P.V.J. Jayasekera has dealt with the various factors that led to the formation of the Congress.¹ K.M. de Silva has traced the development of the Congress with special reference to its character, paying attention to the factional disputes between the Sinhala politicians and the Tamil leader Arunachalam, and the attitude of Governor Sri William Manning towards this organization.² The purpose of this study is to analyse the nature and composition, the character, the conflicts among the **elite** members and the political role of the Congress upto 1930.

The oldest of the national political associations founded on a national basis was the Ceylon National Association. The parent society of this association was the Ceylon Agricultural Association which was founded in 1882 by C.A. de Soysa, the well-known millionaire and philanthropist.³ The object of the latter association was primarily to safeguard the Ceylonese plantation and agricultural interests. In 1884, there was a general feeling among the English educated **elite** that the association should widen its activities and that an earnest effort should be made to obtain a substantial measure of reforms of the constitution.⁴ Meanwhile the great interest shown in 1888 regarding the Sinhalese seat in the Legislative Council resulted in the reorganization of the Agricultural Association as the Ceylon National Association. C.H. de Soysa, the President of the Agricultural Association was succeeded by P. Ramanathan as the President of the Ceylon National Association. The demand for increasing Ceylonization of the Civil Service was one of the main demands of the Ceylon National Association in its first years.⁵ It also started an agitation against the grain tax.⁶ The Ceylon National Association had one positive achievement to its credit, namely its notable contribution to the campaign for the abolition of the Grain tax in 1892.⁷

After the first few years since its formation, the Ceylon National Association was a rather inactive body until its revival in 1905.⁸ An active part in resuscitating the association was taken by the Burghers and the Ceylon Independent. It was during the Presidentship of Arthur Alwis, a Burgher, that the association forwarded the memorandum on constitutional reforms in 1905.⁹