

Coal power – Internal enemy sabotage

This is my reply to "Gard's letter" titled "Birth and death of coal power", which appeared in *The Island* on 29/4/2003.

I shall say this is a grossly distorted version of my letter titled "Coal power - Diesel lobby sabotage", which appeared in *The Island* on 26/2/2003.

"Gard" says that first he wanted to ignore my letter, but later he found that there was some danger if it was allowed to go unchallenged. I have been familiar for quite a long time with "Gard's" writings and its regular harangues in the press on coal power. So, I feel sure he got upset in the following paragraph in my letter. "The CEB states that many coal power plants are required. Then why not allow Barclay Mowlem Consortium to set-up a 300 MW power plant at the site of their choice after ensuring that the tariff offered by them is economical to the country? After all, BMC will spend their own money without any guarantees from the government and if they do not deliver the affected party will be only BMC. If the CEB identifies other convenient sites, let them be developed by others. By this process at least one 300 MW coal power plant will be available within the next three years".

It is clear that for the anti-coal diesel lobby this proposal poses a real danger. Remember when the accelerated Mahaweli was due, many large Hydro Power plants like Apologia, Bowatenna, Victoria, Kotmale, Randenigala, Rantembe was constructed in parallel at record speed. These schemes, the works of civil engineers are the pride of the CEB. In my proposal once the 300 MW coal power plant comes on stream, there is absolutely no place for "Gard's" oil burning, unreliable, polluting, most expensive diesel and gas turbines.

"Gard" displayed similar action ten years ago. In the west coast coal power study by the Japanese consultancy Institute (JCI), the site strongly recommended was Dungalpitiya/Negombo. The lay-out plans were drawn up and the implementation program was prepared to commission the first 165 MW plant in 1998 and the second 165 MW in the year 2000. This was planned with the expectation that the Trinco coal plant will be commissioned in 1996. When discussions were in progress at high level in order to set-up the Japanese proposal, "Gard" got really

upset and a series of letters by him appeared in *The Island* making un-holy suggestions as to how to sabotage the Japanese proposal in the same way he is doing now to the BMC proposal.

Protests against Trinco and Mawella coal was also set-up by the hidden hand diesel lobby through the environmentalists and certain interested parties and this poisoned the minds of the entire population.

Though "Gard" has mentioned that he was only a simple CEB employee, it was observed that in all his writings he speaks authority like the Chairman of the CEB. He distorts facts to suit his motives and to discredit me. At this stage I need to clarify my position.

In the 1970s, my studies in the Water Resources Board reveal that all the major hydro power projects should be planned for peaking and coal power should be arranged for base load duties. The Institution of Electrical Engineers, Sri Lanka overseas branch took my view seriously and invited me to read a technical paper on these aspects.

In response to this request I read a paper titled "some vital aspects of hydropower development in Sri Lanka" on August 29, 1978. My association with the DGEU and the CEB began with the construction of the first hydro power at Norton Bridge in 1945. To make use of my long power development expertise locally and abroad, high political authorities sent me from the Water Resources Board to the CEB in 1977. But "Gard" as principal spokesman on CEB says that I did not have a specific job. The headquarters of the Institution of Electrical Engineers London had given a copy of the paper I had read at their institution to the Victoria Consultants in the accelerated Mahaweli program. In their main report Volume I Victoria scheme November 1978, it is clearly stated on pages 117 and 118 "these facts are graphically illustrated on pages 41 and 43 presented at the meeting of the IEESL in Colombo in August 1978 by Mr. E. Carlo Fernando, Hydropower Consultant to the CEB. To off-set this rapidly increasing peak power deficiency, it is, logically stated by Mr. Fernando whenever feasible future plans for hydro power projects should assume operation at very low plant factors, for example 20 percent and that where possible projects should be designed to facilitate increase of generating capacity to the maximum

extent possible". In this plan the Victoria Consultants made a strong recommendation that strong Thermal (Coal) for base load should be added to the system as early as 1992.

It is on this peaking power requirement that the power plants was upgraded by 100 percent - 300 percent. Victoria was upgraded in the Victoria plan from 120 MW to 420 MW but half this power has not been implemented by the CEB. Similarly other projects were upgraded, Canyon from 30 MW to 60 MW and New Laxapana and Polpitiya too were recommended for upgrading.

In May 1979, I sent an article titled "1000MW Base Load Power Plant for Sri Lanka" to the IEEE for publication. It was returned with the comment that the reviewer considered it is not technical enough for publication. Then under strong protest from me, it was published in the "Engineer June 1979".

The same article was published in the *Daily News*, March 26, 1980. The Australian High Commissioner in Colombo sent a copy of this article to Australia. Then the Australian Deputy Prime Minister had instructed the High Commissioner in Colombo to invite me to Australia for a study tour on coal power. In compliance with this invitation, Secretary to Power and Energy James Lanerolle sent me to Australia. There, I was taken round a chain of coal power plants in the East Coast.

It was an excellent and inspiring visit. During this visit I requested the Australian government to get a coal power study done and it was with this prefeasibility study that the development of the coal power was taken up by the CEB. It should be clearly noted that it was Mr. James Lanerolle CCS, then Secretary Ministry of Power and Energy who on my advice initiated coal power studies in the CEB. Can "Mr. know all" or "Gard" who speaks like a one time Chairman of the CEB deny what has been stated here? The IEESL the premier engineering body at first refused to publish my introductory article on coal power generation. Then "Gard" as if he was the Chairman CEB says that I did not have any specific job during my service at the CEB. Thus, it is clear all the activities and works, which led to the coal power studies, are entirely due to my initiatives as a civil engineer. Can "Gard" who talks like a former CEB Chairman contradict the facts I have set down here?

With the kick-start the coal power

received with the pre-feasibility study, the CEB got a feasibility study done by the Black and Veatch Inc USA. In this study, coal power was to be introduced as early as 1992. This turned out to be a poisonous proposal to the powerful diesel lobby in the CEB. Thus, the Chairman CEB Prof. K. K. Y. W. Perera stopped Black and Veatch doing generation planning though it was in the terms of reference (TOR) and got Lahmeyer Consultants who were doing hydro power desk study to prepare plan pushing coal power to 2007. Till then, the country was to be flooded with oil burning diesels and gas turbines. This plan was hailed as Generation Master Plan of 1989.

This is costing the country Rs. 12 to 15 a unit. As a result, the CEB debt has risen to an astronomical Rs. 17,500 Million and steadily keeps on increasing. Oil fuel power generation is the most expensive, unsatisfactory, unreliable source of energy for base load operation, which is absolutely necessary for the industrialization of Sri Lanka and vital to solve our growing unemployment problem.

Now the Secretary, Ministry of Power and Energy Prof. K. K. Y. W. Perera says that coal power is to be introduced in 2008/2009. The Ministry of Power and Energy only repeats what this oracle proclaims.

We have been told that large numbers of foreign investors are coming over to set-up industries. It is also expected that as many as 2000 small and medium industries will be established in the next five years. All these enterprises will need a base load power supply. Where, may we ask the CEB, is this Base Load Power?

What is frequently published in the news media is the likely introduction of Wind Power, Solar Power, Bio Gas and Mini Hydro - all good for nothing power sources for industrial use. Such a policy will surely makes this country a "Banana Republic - a mere playground for foreign vendors leading to utter ruin of the Nation. The death of the coal power is the death of the Nation. Is this the result "Gard" is aiming at?

Here, we are dealing with a subject of great national importance. So "Gard", who has been writing on this subject for the past ten years since should declare his identity.

E. Carlo Fernando
Negombo