

Pugwash, Globalization and Eppawala: Pugwash Betrayed? Or Eppawala Betrayed?

By D. L. O. Mendis,
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The most intimate tribute I could pay the author of this publication, D. L. O. Mendis, refers to the manner in which he responded to the trauma of having a leg amputated following an accident. As were others in that surgical ward, he was laid out on a mat in a room buzzing with flies who were feasting on the blood on the floor, on bandages, everywhere. He asked me whether I could get him to some other place. He wasn't thinking of a bed or a room with a view, just a place where there weren't so many flies. Not a word about the trauma he had undergone. He just took it as it came, he rolled with the dice.

I mention that episode not simply because it is in a sense a continuing handicap for him; it partly accounts also for the strengths and weaknesses in his work and the mode of operation that he has chosen to adopt.

By profession a Civil Engineer, a field in which he has held high office within the profession, he has distinguished himself in it by his dedication to going beyond the conventional parameters of the discipline. The work of other engineers who have done so, whether by intuition, as with M. S. M. de Silva, probably the most competent and innovative field engineer we have had in the last half a century, or by purposefully redirecting themselves, has not been made public in quite this way.

I for one do not believe in a form of education, particularly in a university, that compartmentalises the business of getting to know the world, the life it supports, and how that's done. The notion of a 'university', indeed, implies quite the opposite. However, since that is how 'knowledge' has come to be organised in the dominant 'western' way, I shall refer to such 'disciplines'.

D. L. O. Mendis is not a social scientist by training and has evidently come to employ concepts and assessments that are common knowledge in those disciplines through an

assiduous attention to his exploratory reading in that area. One wishes that other engineers would take the trouble to do that. Predictably, Mr. Mendis's expositions on GATT, WTO, Seattle, and so on regurgitate what even the common reader of newspapers in the third

tems while making productive use of them is not only 'ancient' knowledge but also current knowledge among farmers whom the system of providing 'irrigation facilities' has rendered largely helpless. Dr. R. L. Brohier recorded, in a more accessible form, those systems in rela-

workers in other professions, administrators and agronomists in particular, that the parameters adopted by the department of irrigation in designing the infrastructure for the provision of water for paddy cultivation were simplistic in the extreme. The design was based on an

the maximum number of farm families. These impediments were not only forest but included existing villages and village tanks that served the farmers in the hamlets, as well as other fauna and flora, within the 'command area'. The main canals were traced regardless of all existing users, and came to an end at the points where the potential command area ended.

Given all the circumstances relating to the business of what is said to be 'public policy', what D. L. O. has done with his knowledge and his time has been a necessary and admirable exercise. While his references to the important people he has met and his compulsive referencing of his own papers and submissions are somewhat embarrassing, his efforts as documented in this book present a case-study of how a lone activist might operate through largely informal channels.

That his hopes in the "Pugwash Group" of somewhat leisurely spokespersons, for desirable shifts in public policy have, in important respects, been confounded by the larger world of commerce and power before which these people seem to genuflect, merely shows the limitations which such individual initiatives are bound to encounter. For example, Henry Kissinger, who was employed by Freeport-McMoran to intercede on their behalf in Indonesia, is/was a "Pugwashite". The direction in which such a man might have exerted himself over Eppawala, - thankfully pre-empted by our Supreme Court - is easy to imagine. Mr. Mendis has also had a word with the President of the World Bank and encouraged organisations such as UNESCO to intercede in protecting the Jaya Ganga complex. He's taken the trouble to make the necessary connections with people who could help in getting such things done. He has done his best to do what our government and its officials should have done. His fascinating account of his experience in this pursuit carries many messages for those who would get to know how governments, business and international organisations operate. It could also be read as a cautionary tale for those who choose to travel alone.



world knows. What matters, however, is that he is making the necessary connections between apparently disparate processes that converge in an attempt to possess and destroy the resources needed to sustain life.

The techniques of conserving our eco-sys-

tem to the irrigation works he surveyed and went on to produce 'Lands, Maps & Surveys' with J. H. O. Paulusz. Both these works would be of direct interest to our engineers, and would have been read by them.

It has long been a matter of concern to field

assessment of catchment yield, the structures required to store it, the location at which a dam or weir would be built and a figure for water-duty per acre. These determined their assessment of the 'command area', - which was then cleared of all impediments to the settlement of