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Memorial Lecture to commemorate Wimalasurendra

Eng. Devapura Jayasena Wimalasurendra was born on September 17, 1874 as the eldest son of creative master craftsman, Mudaliyar Don Juan Devapura Jayasinghe Wimalasurendra. Jayasena, like his father, was himself a craftsman. He excelled, in science and mathematics in school.

He was the first graduate in Civil Engineering from the Ceylon Technical College. Later he specialized in the field of Electrical Engineering and obtained the Faraday House Diploma in a short period of seven months.

Eng. Wimalasurendra was the first to conceive the possibility of harnessing the waters of Kehelgamu Oya, Maskeli Oya and Mahaweli Ganga to produce hydro electric power and to inaugurate the industrial development of the country. In 1918, before the Engineers Association of Ceylon, he presented a paper entitled "Economics of Power Utilization in Ceylon" proposing to develop the hydro resources in the country. He also observed, "The provision of cheap power



Devapura Jayasena Wimalasurendra

is a great need in Ceylon as in the other parts of the world. It ranks only second in importance to cheap food, with which modern conditions have indissolubly associated it. The industrial development of this country had been seriously hampered by the want of cheap power. Our staple products of commerce, eg: copra, rubber, tea etc. would not have needed the tender patronage of foreign millers".

He was elected to the State Council in 1931, where he continued his campaign for harnessing the hydro potential to

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industrialize the country. He pleaded before the State Council in 1935:

"The necessary skilled labour is already to be found in this country, and various industries can very well be developed by utilizing cheap power so that, with proper planning the whole population of this country can be given employment of such a nature as it will give them purchasing power which is almost nil at the present moment."

Industrialising and thereby increasing National Wealth was his prime agenda. In the State Council he said, "I always advocate the establishment of major industries in this country. With cheap hydro-electric power we could develop the manufacture of chemical industries such as fertilizers, and so on. We can manufacture tea chests and

produce sleepers, telegraph poles, and so on with the timber we have in abundance in our forests.

We can also manufacture our textiles, glass, and porcelain for which the raw material is distributed all over the country. The manufacture of textiles, tyres and so on, can also be very well started in this country."

Centralized Power Production was proposed by Wimalasurendra and he emphasized its benefit in the paper read before the Engineering Association of Ceylon in 1918. "The production and distribution of power in bulk from large and suitably placed central power stations would at a conservative figure save us 50% of our local bill for power purposes and effect a still greater saving in cost of power generated". He observed that hydro power

harnessed from the rivers flowing from the central hills could feed the national electric grid. It took more than forty years to become a reality.

Electric Traction was another first, proposed by him. Had his proposal for the electrification of railways been accepted nine decades ago, it would have inaugurated the industrialization of this country. He observed in his paper that "the exploitation and development of the extensive sources of water power available and utilization of them by rational generation and distribution, to meet the large demand for cheap power in this country, both for traction and industrial purposes has so not been attempted to any degree". Even now, it is not too late, The Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka, has been trying its best, has held seminars and lobbied to commence the electrification of railways.

Higher Education was as equally important to him, if not more. He observed during the budget speech of 1935: "I must submit to this house that two important questions, namely the question of the Hy-

dro-electric Scheme and the University Project, have been left out. It is impossible to understand how these proposals of such far reaching importance for the development of this country could be ignored".

The Department of Electrical Undertakings (DGEU) which came into being on October 1, 1924, was one of his proposals. He also proposed in 1933, the creation of a Central Electricity Board, to control all the electric undertakings of the State, and to govern the electric supply business in general. The Ceylon Electricity Board was established in 1969, thirty six years after his suggestion.

Public Assets: The Government at that time had its own deals. Wimalasurendra has quoted in the Ceylon Daily News. Hydro Electric Supplement (pub 1940) the observation of live members, including lion D.S. Senanayake of the Committee of Enquiry set up to inquire into the Hydro Electric Scheme. "We are thus of opinion that the purchase from the Colombo Electric Tramway and Lighting Company's

Plant and Distribution System has been a great loss to the country without any real compensatory gain and consequently not only has the total capital cost of the Government Electrical Undertakings been unduly inflated by a very considerable un-remunerative surcharge, but Government has also to supply to the Company for a period of 21 years current at a loss - at a rate far below the total cost at which it is being generated". The Governments of today too follow the same economic principle: Buy at Rs. 12/kwh and sell at Rs. 10/kwh.

To commemorate his 132nd birthday, the Electrical and Electronics Engineering Sectional Committee of Institution of Engineers, Sri Lanka organized the annual memorial lecture "The future of Hydro Power in Sri Lanka" by Deputy General Manager (Mahaweli Complex) Ceylon Electricity Board, Eng. W.R.A. Perera, recently at the Wimalasurendra Auditorium of IESL 120/15, Wijerama Mawatha, Colombo 07.

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Chairman,