

Attitudes of young people towards politics in Sri Lanka

Anton Piyarathne*

Department of Social Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka, Nawala, Nugegoda

Young people are very vital in the political process of any country. In Sri Lanka, colonial intervention introduced a new system of government in place of the local "king" based administration. Political parties, politicians and parliament became powerful under this new political system. Furthermore, the trust of the people in general and young people in particular is very vital for the socio-economic well being of any society. The result of distrust of youth in political processes was demonstrated in two youth insurrections led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in 1971 and 1988-1989. In addition to these insurrections, the LTTE in the north showed their dissatisfaction on the existing political structure through a military struggle, which has been in existence for more than twenty years. These movements have sprung from the ineffectiveness of the political process of the country. Recent experience shows that the trust of youth in political activities has been weakening rapidly. This presentation is based on a study conducted by the author to find out the attitudes of the Sri Lankan youth towards politics.

For the purpose of simplicity, the study defined youth as unmarried persons who belong to the age group between 18 years and 32 years. A sample of 692 young persons was selected from 22 divisional secretariat areas using random sampling technique. These young people were interviewed using interviewer-administered questionnaire. In addition, 110 in-depth interviews were also conducted by the author.

The findings of the study show that young people are not satisfied with the political system of the country. Their trust on politics is weakening steadily. Young persons are not satisfied with politicians, political parties and the political process of the country as well. They assume that politicians do not do justice to their positions since they take politics for granted as a "means to earn an income". The positive aspect of the findings is that the young people have some idea about how and what politics should look like. They wanted to have a better political culture in the country. There is a considerable gap in perceptions between the political expectations of the youth and "how politics is really done". As a result, young people do not like to get involved in active politics. This is a very unhappy trend and must be urgently addressed by the politicians, policy planners and civil society since the youth form the future of Sri Lanka.

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*apiya@ou.ac.lk

Tel: 011-2853777 Ext. 417