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Enemies Within

The mild-mannered family man and affluent planter was shaving in the cottage of his Central Highlands tea estate on Nov. 12 when Sri Lankan soldiers burst in. Pointing a pistol at his head, the commander asked: "Are you Wijeweera?" It's unclear whether the accosted squire glanced at himself in the mirror just then. He would have seen an unremarkable face, conventionally clean-shaven, neatly coiffed, even a bit bland. But as a matter of fact — why, yes: he was Rohana Wijeweera, leader of a fierce and feared radical underground that has been the scourge of Sri Lankan civil authority and civil peace altogether these past two years. The shadowy terrorist whose public image had lived on in his former avatar of a horn-rimmed, dreadlocked Rasputin was now under deep cover as a gentleman landowner. Before long, the head of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, or People's Liberation Front, was hustled off to Colombo for interrogation, and not long after that he was dead — his body being cremated before anyone could inquire into just why.

Not too many Sri Lankans care to know that answer. Until the intelligence coup that brought Wijeweera to heel, the JVP was like a demonic poltergeist haunting the land and eluding all efforts at exorcism, control or appeasement. It imposed a reign of terror that never noticeably scrupled to exact summary blood-justice wherever its agents pleased. Even its agenda has been obscure: a nebulous mishmash of Marxist dialectics, monkish puritanism and Sinhalese supremacy. Whatever Sri Lankans may think about the state of their government and nation — and they have had ample cause to feel unsure about both — the JVP's outrages have provided grounds for enough vendettas to fill a census list. Now that Wijeweera has gone under the deepest cover of all, though, a deceptive peace hangs over even the innocence of the grave.

Like many another revolutionary movement, the JVP is structured into cells reporting singly up a secret chain of command and with little or no knowledge of one another's identity. In theory, then, decapitating the creature should kill it. The fact that its ghostly generalissimo and his top politburo chiefs were exposed attests to what must be judged an ultimately successful campaign of counter-terrorism. By most accounts, the mettle of JVP warriors was severely sapped by such open death sentences waiting to find them. This was a penalty they had reason to doubt in the days when a new head of government entering office would open the jail doors and extend blanket amnesties.

Mr. J.R. Jayewardene released Wijeweera and scores of other insurgents in 1977 when he came to power, and Mr. Rañasinghe Premadasa freed 1,800 ranking JVP detainees when he won the presidency a year ago. Foreclosing that escape seems to have opened some mouths. Bodies of young men seized from their homes and found burnt to death or dismembered do not make pretty pictures. But *habeas corpus* is unknown to the JVP, and in a war that has no battlefield the Geneva Conventions do not necessarily apply.

Whatever else it achieved, Wijeweera's mysterious death pre-empted another political barter. The politics of wishful thinking has proved a poor match to Sri Lanka's twin challenges of Tamil secessionists and Sinhalese radicals. If the thug-crouch has more effectively helped win one war, however, it's no model for winning the peace. Politics is the only instrument here. It has to both build on and transcend the gains at hand. One notable gain has been the new measure of inter-service cooperation evidenced by the Wijeweera's capture. Intelligence-sharing between the police and armed forces, not famous collaborators until now, apparently helped run the fugitive to earth and showed what teamwork can accomplish. Another, unanticipated gain was the exposure of Wijeweera's incognito way of life.

The pre-eminent scold of the proletariat class turned out to be luxuriating as an arrant kulak. Evidence suggests that a lot of his young JVP disciples were demoralised to learn this. And a third boost, by Colombo's lights at least, came from last week's Indian election. It raised hopes for settling the Tamil turmoil; a new Indian government succeeding Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's and pledged to a hands-off policy towards Sri Lanka.

Yet these advantages are likely to evaporate quickly without a change in Sri Lanka's internal politics. All the grief and bloodshed of the past six years ought to have driven home the futility of war. It hasn't. Within the security forces and various guerilla armies are some 150,000 men who know no trade but fighting and no political wisdom other than kill or be killed. Many reasonable deals have been floated, only to be literally shot down by extremists. Outside aid by India was a crucial factor in the rise of the Tamil Tigers, just as it underpins today the rival Tamil faction holding power in Sri Lanka's northeast. But whether any successors to Mr. Gandhi would really wash their hands of the dispute seems very questionable. And whether Colombo's own men in uniform could then



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subdue the guerillas handily is also open to doubt. The JVP prosecuted its war for a long time without any outside help at all, and the brand of counter-offensive waged in turn has also testified to some breakdown in security-service discipline. The army has had to arrest 27 of its own officers for such serious lapses as murder and armed robbery.

Sri Lankans have had a hard time thinking as a nation,

and wholesale slaughter hasn't made it easier. They have thought ethnically and communally. When the government disowns engag  monks and other Sinhalese supremacists opposed to a fair deal for Tamils, the first big breakthrough will be scored. When a climate of hope replaces the politics of privilege generally, there will be fewer murderous impulses lurking behind the bland face in the mirror. ■