

THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION (OMBUDSMAN)

BY PROFESSOR BERTRAM BASTIAMPILLAI*

An Ombudsman, known in Sri Lanka as the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, is a unique institution established in various forms in a number of countries to protect individuals against unjust acts on the part of government officials or agencies. In Sri Lanka under the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration Act 17 of 1981 a Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration also called the Ombudsman was appointed, and has been functioning since that time, 1982.

The Ombudsman is an independent mediator whose primary role is to protect the rights of the individual who believes or feels that he has been the victim of unfair and irregular acts committed by the public administration. Generally appointed to office by the legislative body, the Parliament, (in Sri Lanka by the President) the Ombudsman in many instances functions in a supervisory and investigative capacity on behalf of Parliament, acting on complaints received from aggrieved persons against government officials or agencies.

The Ombudsman is often perceived as a Scandinavian institution, since it had its beginnings in early nineteenth century Sweden, and was later firmly established in Denmark, Norway and Finland. During the past several decades, however, the Ombudsman or the office of the mediator has got established in a number of countries, outside Scandinavia such as Australia, Austria, Barbados, Canada, France, Ghana, Guyana, India, Pakistan, Jamaica, Japan, Mauritius, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom and in certain areas in the United States. These countries have all utilized the Ombudsman system in one form or another. Moreover, several African countries too are today using the authority and jurisdiction of the Ombudsman.

An Ombudsman receives complaints from aggrieved parties, and subsequently initiates an investigation if the claim has merit and falls within his jurisdiction. Some actions cannot be inquired into by him. The Ombudsman is generally granted access to the documents of all authorities within his jurisdiction, which are pertinent to the investigation. He then usually issues a statement of recommendation based on

* M.A. (Lond), Ph.D (Ceylon), formerly of the Dept. of History & Political Science, University of Colombo; Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, Sri Lanka.