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GENERAL ELECTIONS - 1977

CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS (POLITICAL WING)

MANIFESTO

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THE MANIFESTO OF THE CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS (POLITICAL WING)

The Ceylon Workers' Congress (Political Wing) has a long history of struggle to obtain social justice and human dignity to the down trodden masses, and is now a recognised political party under Section 28 A of the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Order in Council.

It is the successor to the Ceylon Indian Congress which was inaugurated in 1939 with the blessings of Shri Jawharhalal Nehru in order to provide an exploited section of the population an organisation powerful enough to withstand the challenges that surfaced at that time and a rallying point to safeguard and advance their civic liberties. The organisation thus formed had as its aims and objects:—

- (i) The attainment of 'Purna Swaraj' for the people of India.
- (ii) The attainment of 'Purna Swaraj' for the people of Ceylon.
- (iii) To promote and safeguard the interests of Indians in Ceylon.
- (iv) To promote amity and closer relations between India and Ceylon and the co-operation of the people of India and Ceylon in the attainment of common ideals.

Through the peculiarity of the situation then, the organisation was set up to cater to the interests of persons of Indian origin, the majority of whom were plantation labour, but had the elasticity to gear itself to the changing

pattern whereby Sinhala workers who entered the plantation labour community too were drawn into its ranks to make the organisation the pervasive one that it is today.

With the attainment of independence by both India and Sri Lanka, our organisation was not only named the Ceylon Workers Congress but our aims and objects too were recriented in the context of the changed situation. They include inter alia:—

- (i) The establishment of an order of society which is free from hindrance to the all round development of its individual members; which fosters the growth of the human personality in all its aspects and goes to the utmost limit in progressively eliminating social or economic exploitation and inequality; the profit motive in economic activity and organisation of society; and the anti-social concentration of power in any form.
- (ii) The organisation of society so as to ensure full employment and the best utilisation on its man power and other resources.
- (iii) To place industry under public ownership and/or control in suitable form and secure increasing association of the workers in the administration o industry leading to their full participation in itsf profits, management and ownership.
- (iv) To secure and promote full facilities for the involvement of all segments of the population in nation building and thus preserving and fostering the intrinsic concept of liberties inalienable in a democratic society and the removal of all impediments in the achievement of a social order based on the right of individuals and groups to social justice and the elimination of all forms of discrimination based on race, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or racial origin, property, birth or other status.

In the process of discharging our role as the guardian of the socio-economic and political rights of the plantation workers, we successfully launched a struggle to prevent the dehousing and destitution of resident workers as far back as 1946 when the then Government acquired Knavesmire Estate in the Kelani Valley District. Our strategy was the courting of arrest and imprisonment of workers, their wives and children in preference to quitting their living quarters. It has been our steadfast conviction that all governmental schemes or development plans concerning the estates should involve resident workers who to all intents and purposes had made the estate their home. It is in the furtherence of this conviction that we successfully challenged the eviction of the resident workers on Choisy Estate and Balapokuna Estate in the Kotmale Electorate, and opposed the take over of 7000 acres in the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliva Electorate. It is to safeguard this principle that the workers of Sanguhar and Delta Estates in the Gampola Electorate refused to be intimidated by acts of looting and arson in May this year and leave the estates.

Our involvement in active politics saw seven representatives of the Ceylon Indian Congress being returned to the first Parliament in 1947 and our satygraha campaign in 1952 against citizenship laws that disfranchised persons of Indian origin. Since its inception the Ceylon Workers' Congress (Political Wing) has championed the cause of the estate workers and workers in other sectors of the economy at every stage whenever the need arose.

Through our Trade Union Organisation we have established industrial norms and practices in the plantation sector. Some of the welfare legislation concerning plantation labour have been adopted either at the instance of the Ceylon Workers' Congress or from standards set by us through discussions, negotiations or legal awards. Our services to the workers, the common man and the down trodden masses have not been confined to the national platform. We have made use of our international affiliations to focus world opinion on the ruthless exploitation of the

plantation workers and the man-made starvation conditions that were brought about at one stage in the country.

We could extend this recitation ad nauseam with an endless catalogue of achivements, but we do not propose to do so as our record and our giant membership are ample proof of the fact that we have played our due role to improve the quality of life of the workers. We have merely illustrated certain aspects of our past in order to project our potential for the future.

At this General Election, the delimitation of electoral districts has been made in such a manner that it has made it possible for the persons of Indian origin to return a representative of their choice from only one constituency in the plantation districts. Moreover a large majority of plantation workers have been excluded from the electoral register. We are sponsoring one candidate at the Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya 3-member constituency and one candidate at the 3-member Colombo Central Constituency. As a Political Party we intend to broad - base our political involvement so as to encompass the gamut of national life, including sponsoring of candidates at elections to local bodies. We shall work towards creating the conditions necessary for every citizen to participate in the process of democrasy.

We shall work towards the establishment of a society in which the rule of law will prevail untramelled by policial and bureaucratic, interference; the attainment of social justice; cultural development and economic opportunity including the full range of human endeavour and talents essential to a strong non-corrupt and non-elite society for this and the future generations of Sri Lanka; and the advancement of a system of relations between labour and management whereby they can deal with one another as independent agencies. We shall also strive to eliminate the basic weaknesses and the funtamental debilitating factors that retarded the progress of the country due mainly to social misdirection and economic mis-management. Our battle in the policial arena at this stage is at a time when unemployment on the one hand and the cost of living on the

other have both reached astronomical heights. This has been due to the energies of the nation having been dissipated in the pursuit of grandiose economic plans and communal policies till to-day we have reached the nadir of economic performance coupled with a frustrating zenith of social expectation.

DEVELOPMENT: The creation of employment, fairer distribution of income and wealth. satisfaction of basic needs by way of food, shelter clothing. essential public services, adequately remunerative jobs for all, would be our goals as regards development policies. We will press for the gearing of economic and social policy including fiscal measures towards ensuring a fair distribution of income and wealth which will also increase employment and direct economic growth, the satisfaction of the needs of the people and the stimulation of investment by procedures in keeping with free collective bargaining, encouragement for collective savings and establishing profit sharing schemes. We shall lay emphasis on the fact that a fair incomes distribution will furthermore broaden markets and increase the scope for labour intensive investments. For the purpose of these ends we shall propose the creation of a National Commission dealing with employment and basic needs, co-ordinating programmes for basic needs strategies. Such a Commission should work closely with authorities catering for the administration of economic plans, finance, education, labour, technology, foreign investment and social administration.

LAND, LABOUR AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

Traditional approaches to rural development have proved inadequate to improve the basic needs of the vast majority of people living in rural areas. The major objective of rural development must be achievement of full and adequately remunerative employment and to ensure adequate levels of food, shelter, education and health for the rural population as a whole. Substantial changes are necessary in the prevailing tural structure. Therefore we shall encourage the development of a countravailing power from within the poorer sector by the development of organisations of rural workers

led by leaders of their choice, and ensure their effective participation in planning and implementing rural development. The necessary changes should be decided in full consultation with and implemented through the rural workers and their organisation in regard to meaningful land utilisation. Land utilisation should be aimed at increasing productivity so as to increasing the purchasing power of the population. Efforts should be made to establishing industries to produce agro food products for local consumption in rural areas.

Land reform should be sufficiently elastic as to allow evolution towards more advanced and properly constituted forms of agricultural worker organizations such as associated farming, product co-operatives or land consolidation schemes on a voluntary basis rather than on the basis of ownership alone. We shall endeavour to work for the development of supporting services and the building up of appropriate rural infrastructures, in particular water supply and irrigation, housing, access roads, transportation facilities, extention services, credit services and marketing facilities.

Priority should be given to the creation of jobs in rural areas through labour intensive programmes, small scale rural handicrafts industries and as far as possible these works should be made available through rural workers organisations. The effective participation of the people in the economic and social structure of the rural community is essential for changes in this sector to take place. Therefore we will work for the comlete elimination of any vestige of serfdom remaining in the rural sector and work for the introduction of protective legislation concerning farmers and cultivators of every description. Land settlement schemes should be undertaken so as not to destroy viable agricultural land or the displacement of labour, but to put the land into use so as to benefit the economy as well as the population. Due attention should be given to the environmental and ecological aspects.

PLANTATIONS: The chaotic conditions that prevail in the mainstay of the country's economy - the plantation industry - should be eliminated both in the manage-

ment and labour relations structure - to obtain full employment and optimum productivity whilst at the same time ensuring security of employment, and the contractual rights of the workers. It will be our aim to see an end to the discriminatory treatment meted out to Plantatinn Labour by the obtainment for them of, inter alia:—

- (1) A monthly wage and terms and conditions of employment as in the corporation sector;
- (2) cost of living allowance payable on the same basis as in the case of workers in the public, corporation and mercantile sectors;
- (3) Equal wages for work of equal value irrespective of sex;
- (4) A gratuity scheme of one month's wages for each year of service;

We shall support the creation of a single authority to administer the state controlled plantations, providing for labour representation in such a body through representative organisations of workers and the meaningful participation of workers in management at all levels.

PERSONS OF INDIAN ORIGIN OUTSIDE THE PLANTATIONS

The exploitation of the persons of Indian origin is not confined to the plantations alone. There are groups of these persons, who are landless, and who are employed in Local Govt. institutions, the Railway the PWD, etc., whose terms of employment are characterised by the arbitrary right of the employers to hire and fire them and throw them out of their quarters at will. All these years their existence and their vissicitudes have been noted only when their vote is sought. No attempt had been made to organise them or provide them with the leadership that is necessary to fight for their rights. Their dependants have been compelled to languish in frustration due to avenues of occupations not being made available to them. It will, therefore, be our special endeavour to encourage these persons to organise themselves and to obtain

for them through their organisation, security of employment and tenancy, along with other contractual rights, and land allotments so as to afford opportunity for them and their dependants to substantially improve the quality of their life.

HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL AMENITIES:

We shall work towards the initiation of low cost housing construction programmes to ease the housing congestion in urban areas with particular reference to improving accommodation of shanty dwellers. We shall work towards the formulation of a realistic national housing policy so as to encourage more people to own their own dwelling houses. Supporting services for money and material and technical know-how at minimum cost to the house builder should be made available. Incentives should be given to the private sector to enter the area of low cost housing construction on a large scale. We shall work towards the initiation of water supply and electrification of all areas which at present do not have adequate water service facilities and electricity. We shall press for the provision of proper access roads to all dwelling houses.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR DEVELOPING HUMAN RESOURCES:

The educational system needs to be restructured so as to lay greater emphasis on the harnessing of human resources in order to equip individuals to take up and maintain work and enable them to play their part in society. A new educational objective adapted to living and working conditions which at the same time provides for adult education and training must be formulated. This therefore involves:

- (i) Training Institutes to establish educational structures which cover all levels and put general education technical and vocational education and training on an equal footing.
- (ii) Comprehensive measures and machinery to ensure access to education and training in support of professional or inter professional mobility encouraging

the practice of alternating periods of study, training and work.

- (iii) Development of social professions which encourage individuals from all sectors of the society to undergo apprenticeship, training and re-training to acquire skills and enable them to practice diversification and complimentarity of productive activities.
- (iv) Official recognition of the value of non formal education.
- (v) Integration of the educational system on the estates into the national system of education in consultation with the workers through their representative organisations.
- (vi) Merit should be the sole criterion for admission to higher educational institutions irrespective of race, or language and the medium of instructions should be the mother tongue.

YOUTH: Our ultimate goal is full employment for every able bodied person; but cognizance would be taken of the fact that till this goal is achieved the majority of young people of this country would be idle and left to their own devises for existence. We shall bend our efforts to mobilise this vast reservoir of youth power and youth organisations. particularly in the plantations, towards community projects and other productive pursuits by the formulation of appropriate schemes in consonanc with the concept of basic needs and national development requirements.

FUNDAMENTAL AND MINORITY RIGHTS:

Having regard to the fact that Sri Lanka is a multiracial and multi-religious country, we shall work towards the obtaining of equal opportunities to persons of all denominations and protection preservation, and development of their respective religions, cultural heritage and identity of the different ethnic groups, and the realisation of fundamental rights in keeping with the precepts of democratic freedoms and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A person born in Sri Lanka to parents ordinarily resident and or domiciled in this country shall have ipso facto, the status of a Citizen of Sri Lanka. All such persons shall be entitled "To all the Rights and Freedoms" set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "without distinction of any kind such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or racial origin, property, or other status."

The Tamil language shall have the status at one of the official languages of the country and all laws shall be enacted or made in the Tamil language as well. All Tamil speaking people should have the right to transact business with the state and all state sponsored institutions in the Tamil language.

Ethnic rights should be maintained and whilst recognising the freedom of an individual to establish himself without hindrance in any place of his choice in the country, we would, as a matter of policy, oppose any governmental course of action which would distrub or disrupt or infringe upon ethnic rights and the tenor of life of the people of that area.

Such fundamental rights including the language, religious, ethnic and cultural rights of the minorities should be enshrined in the Constitution of Sri Lanka and be made a living reality by providing for their justiciability.

We shall be responsive to endeavours of peoples and their representative organisations to enrich the quality of their life in consonance with their just aspirations and the ideals of democratic freedoms and fundamental rights.

INTEGRATION: The plantation workers of Sri Lanka have for well over a period of 10 decades been denied social justice both by the British Coloniol Government and the Governments of independent Sri Lanka by their continued exploitation by the failure to grant fair and equitable wages and conditions of service and living comparable with those enjoyed by the rest of the workers of the country and in addition compelled them to live in a state of captive labour. It is a matter of utmost urgency that their integration into the mainstream of national life be brought about by:

- (a) Their release from the captive labour situation by separating residence from employment and the establishment of settlements in the plantation areas and making available to them such services as education, health, food supplies, clothing, etc. on the same basis as such services are made available to the rest of the community as opposed to the present system whereby these services are routed through management.
- (b) The full participation of estate workers who are citizens of Sri Lanka on a basis of priority when land alienation is effected on estates in which they reside.
- (c) The removal of the hiatus in the citizenship laws by the deletion of words "before appointed date" in the Citizenship Act Cap. 349 so that a person born in Sri Lanka shall have the status of a citizen of Sri Lanka if (i) his paternal grandfather was born in Sri Lanka or (ii) his paternal great grandfather was born in Sri Lanka.
- (d) The elimination of all discrimination between citizens by descent and citizens by registration.
- (e) The use of the Tamil language for correspondence in all estate areas and usage of the Tamil language in all Forms and Questionnaires and other documents, and the appointment of Tamil Registrars of Births and Deaths for Tamil speaking people.
- (f) Encouragement of Government policy so as not to upset the substantial concentration of minority groups but to be so adopted as to foster such

- concentration to ensure their legitimate representation in the National State Assembly;
- (g) Re-defining boundaries of the District Revenue Officer, Grama Sevaka and Local Authorities in the estate areas so that the citizens of Sri Lanka of recent Indian Origin can have the opportunity of participating in the process of democracy at the grass roots level and also participate in development and other activities through the Tamil language.

THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN DEVELOPMENT:

We will strive to obtain recognition of the important role that Trade Unions can play in promoting economic and social development. The organised workers should be made partners in identifying basic needs, in setting national targets for growth and employment policies. Collective bargaining between employer and representative organisations of workers will be encouraged to ensure employer employee relations in the field of employment security, promotions, productions techniques, working environment, personnel policies, wages, superannuation, etc. and participation in decision making and forms of influencing management structure. Collective bargaining stimulates productivity, widens the domestic market and strengthens the economic and social security of the workers and their dependants. We will stimulate the expansion of the role of trade unions to make their own concrete contribution to employment creation by measures to strengthen and consolidate the labour movement which is the essential requisite to embark upon project-oriented programmes. We will work towards the initiation of Social Insurance and Security Schemes and Welfare programmes to embrace all workers and the promulgation of protective labour legislation. We will press for the implementation of the rights set out in I.L.O. Convention No. 98, concerning the Right of Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining.

The Ceylon Workers' Congress (Political Wing) will work to secure increasing association of the workers through their

organisations in the administration of industry and their full participation in the profits, management and ownrship and strive to secure and promote full facilities for educational and cultural programmes of the working class and the common man; and strive for the removal of all discrimination based on race, sex, caste, etc.

In the final analysis we shall exert all our energies and resources towards establishing a just and clean society free from corruption and nepotism and one which leads to the all round development of individuals, fosters the growth of the human personality in all its aspects and goes to the utmost limits in progressively eliminating social or economic exploitation and inequities.

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