

# VOICE OF THE VOICELESS

## BULLETIN OF THE COORDINATING SECRETARIAT FOR PLANTATION AREAS

### SECRETARY'S REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 01.07.1986—30.06.1987

#### A. Introductory Remarks

This report is intended to cover the period 01.07.86—30.06.87. The report for the period 01.09.85—30.06.86 was published in *Voice of the Voiceless*, No. 26, September 1986.

#### B. Organization of the Secretariat

At the Annual General Meeting held at the Satyodaya Seminar Hall in Kandy on 6th July 1986 Paul Caspersz, Ranjith de Silva and A. C. Emmanuel were unanimously elected Coordinator, Secretary and Asst. Secretary cum Treasurer respectively. They continued to hold these offices during the period. Y. R. Rajapakse and Joseph Jeskody functioned as Office Secretary and Assistant Office Secretary, while Raja Uswetikeiyawa functioned as the Audio-Visual Technician of the CSPA.

At the end of the period under review the following organizations held membership in the Secretariat: Agrapatana Community Education Centre, Bogawantalawa Social Action Group, Christian Workers Fellowship (Plantation Sector), Diyanilla Technical Institute, Gami Seva Sevana, Hill Country Youth Assembly, Kotagala Samuga Sevai Mandram, Lanka Social Development Association—Kandy, Plantation Women's Group—Hatton, Plantation Workers Fellowship, Satyodaya Centre for Social Research & Encounter, Service Civil International SED—Galle, Social Welfare Mandram—Norwood, Sri Lanka United Agro Workers' Society—Matugama, Uva Socio Economic and Community Development Centre—Badulla.

The Secretariat which lost contact with Bogawantalawa Social Action Group and Uva Socio Economic and Community Development Centre—Badulla in 1983 was very pleased to see those two groups resuming membership in this period.



### C. Committee Meetings

During the period covered by this report the Action Committee, consisting according to the Constitution of the Coordinator, Secretary and Assistant Secretary-cum-Treasurer and one member elected or appointed by each of the constituent groups met on six occasions: 7 October 86, 11 November 86, 21 January 87, 11 March 87, 22 April 87 and 15 June 87. Attendance was satisfactory. The following is a brief summary of the main topics discussed at the Committee Meeting and of the activities that followed the discussions.

### D. Subjects of Discussions and Follow-up Action

#### 1. Holding of a Leadership Training Course in Six Sessions:

The Training Course is especially meant for the emerging Leadership in the CSPA groups. Lectures on various subjects are given by university professors, teachers and others who are experts in their field. During the period 3 Sessions of the Training Course were held on 11—13 November 1986, 16—18 December 1986 and 18—20 February 1987.

Session I : The subjects treated were Evolution of Humankind, Evolution of Societies, Capitalist and Socialist Societies.

Session II : The subjects treated were Capitalism and Socialism as Economic Systems, Capitalism and Socialism as Political Systems, History of Plantation Society, Capitalism and Socialism in Sri Lanka's Contemporary Society.

Session III : The subjects treated were The Role of Ideologies and Religions in Development; Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity. Each Seminar consisted of 4 classes. At the end of each class much time was allowed for questions and discussion. It is envisaged that at the next 3 Sessions the participants will do most of the work themselves at Workshops.

#### 2. Organizing a Seminar on Privatization for the Leadership of the Plantation Trade Unions and Voluntary Groups active in the plantation sector.



CSPA member groups were opposed to the idea of Privatization of the estates and stressed the importance of protecting the nationalized plantations as long as they remain the main income earner in Sri Lanka. Since the plantations are the common heritage of our people it is by such action resisting privatization that the future of the plantation workers and the people as a whole could be assured.

Two Seminars were organized on the subject. The first took place on 5th July 86. The subjects treated were History of the Plantations, Land Reform and Nationalization, Effect of Privatization of the Estates on the Economy of the Country, Present Government Approach to the Plantation Sector, Future of the Plantation Workers - Our Response.

The second seminar was held on 30th August 86, The subjects treated were Privatization of Estates - Present Trends and Implications for Plantation Workers and Peasants, Impact of Privatization on the lives of plantation workers, NADSA and its Aftermath, Lanka Estates Development Ltd, Nationalization - its benefits to workers and problems arising from it. A follow-up seminar on the same subject, but including a wider range of participants, has been planned for the ensuing year.

### 3. Citizenship Act:

Already early last year the CSPA welcomed and supported the agreements regarding citizenship reached in January 1986 after the negotiations between the High Commissioner of India in Sri Lanka, the Minister of National Security and the Minister of Rural Industrial Development.

A press release dated 22 - 01 - 1986 was issued by the CSPA appealing to the all Trade Unions, organizations and individuals to support the smooth implementation of the agreements. The press release was published in *Voice of the Voiceless*, No 24, March 1986.

Following the agreements, the government of Sri Lanka framed enabling legislation by way of the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act No. 5 of 1986, certified on 18 February 1986.



The Act noted that the Government of India undertook to complete the granting of Indian citizenship to those entitled to it within 6—8 months of the date of enactment of the Act while the Government of Sri Lanka resolved to grant Sri Lanka Citizenship to those entitled to it within 18 months of the date of enactment of the Act. The date by which the granting of Sri Lanka citizenship has to be completed is therefore 18 August 1987 (unless the date is extended by the government). The CSPA decided to do what it could to help the estate people to obtain citizenship.

To this end the CSPA organized a discussion on 21 February 1987 on issues affecting the granting of citizenship. The chief speaker was Mr A. M. D. Rajan of the Ceylon Workers Congress. After the discussion Joseph Jeskody, Assistant Office Secretary of the CSPA, offered his services to all member organizations in order to explain the conditions of obtaining citizenship to individuals and groups with which the member organizations are in contact. Joseph Jeskody consequently visited several places where member organizations work and explained the conditions of obtaining citizenship. Several member organizations attended to this matter directly without the assistance of the Secretariat.

#### 4. Evaluation of the CSPA :

Although the work of the CSPA has been subject to annual review by the members and the Action Committee, it was decided on the advice of Christian Aid to have an external evaluation of the CSPA'S work over the past years. The Action Committee therefore selected two external evaluators and instructed them to undertake the evaluation. The two evaluators were Mr Henry De Mel and Mr M. Ramalingam. Mr Henry de Mel and Mr M. Ramalingam began the work of evaluation in May 1987. After some weeks Mr Ramalingam was unable to proceed with his evaluation for good reasons. The Secretariat then asked Mr De Mel to proceed with the evaluation using whatever material Mr Ramalingam collected. The evaluation is still in progress at the time of writing this report.

#### 5. Research :

As a follow-up of the Workshop on the Role of the Plantation Sector in Child Survival and Development held in collaboration with the Children's Secretariat of the Ministry of Plan Implementation in October 1985 (see Report 1. 9. 85 - 30. 6. 86), at the request of the Children's Secretariat, the CSPA forwarded to it a research proposal on the situation of Mother and Child in the Non-state Managed Estates of



Sri Lanka. Dr L. D. Hewagama and Mr M. Sinnathamby of the Peradeniya University assisted Paul Caepersz in the drawing up of the Research Proposal. Finally the proposal was forwarded by the Children's Secretariat to UNICEF for funding. The CSPA awaits the response of UNICEF.

#### 6. Peace Work :

The Secretariat considered work for Peace founded on justice to be extremely important in the context of the deteriorating inter-ethnic situation in the country.

Hence the Secretariat assisted member organizations and the Central Province Peace Committee in action to foster understanding, goodwill and friendship among the different communal groups living in the country. The Secretariat made a grant of Rs. 7500/= to the Central Province Peace Committee.

#### 7. International Women's Day :

About 200 women from the member organizations participated at the Women's Day Celebrations which was held in Kandy by the Secretariat on 8 March 87 for the first time. The Deputy Mayor of Kandy, Mrs Chandra Ranaraja, was the chief guest at the meeting. This was followed by an exhibition of posters which depicted how women are exploited, and how they ought to resist such exploitation.

#### 8. Relief to victims of Communal Disturbance:

The Secretariat, with the assistance of some member organizations, organized relief programmes at various refugee camps in Hatton area in July as in the previous year.

#### E. Publications

a) *Voice of the Voiceless*: Keeping to its quarterly schedule, this English Bulletin was published in September and December 1986 and in March and June 1987.



b) *Kundrin Kural*: 12 issues of the Tamil Bulletin were published during the period under review. The Bulletin is meant to be read by workers in the plantation areas and their families. The articles for publication are selected with this objective in mind. An open poetry competition was successfully conducted by the Editorial Board of the Bulletin. The theme of the poems was Life in the Plantation Areas. The competition had two sections: one for poems in the traditional Tamil metres and the other was for free verse. The best poems will be published in future issues and the awards to winners will be made at a date to be decided by the Editorial Board.

c) *Anawarana*: The Sinhala magazine of the Secretariat is of commendable standard. The Committee decided that it should be a quarterly publication as the *Voice of the Voiceless*. The expectations of the Secretariat in publishing a Sinhala magazine have been achieved to a large extent.

### The Future

Applications for membership in the CSPA are increasing. If this is a sign that the Secretariat has been able to win the trust and confidence of the people in the plantation areas, we have to prove increasingly worthy of that trust and confidence.

What has been said in an earlier Report is still true; Peace is still the utmost need of the day in our country. The Secretariat is always prepared to give its fullest cooperation to any individual, political party, trade union or NGO which works sincerely to restore peace among the various groups in our plural society.

The Secretariat congratulates its member organizations which have worked for peace between estate workers and peasants in their own areas and encourages them to continue to work resolutely for peace-with-justice.



With peace, the ferry service between Talaimannar and Rameswaram will start again. The CSPA must be ready both directly and through its member organizations to be of maximum service to all those estate families who will have to go to India. They and their for-bears have served the country well. The Secretariat must work hard to give them a grateful farewell.

The CSPA should also re-establish links with organizations in South India which work for the welfare of the Sri Lankan Repatriates. Ideally, as the Secretariat used to say when it began its repatriation work in 1976, Sri Lankan NGOs will help the repatriate families until they enter the Indian ferry at Talaimannar and from there the Indian NGOs should take over.

With peace, there will be the implementation of several welfare programmes for the estate workers both under the Medium Term Investment Programme (MTIP) and under the various educational and other programmes of international aid agencies. Under the MTIP, for instance, USD 14.3 million or over Rs. 400 million is to be made available to SPC and JEDB estates for welfare programmes besides USD 16.6 million or Rs. 470 million for housing. There are also several other welfare programmes in which much money will be spent. Are the estate workers aware of these programmes? In the ultimate analysis, they would be the best monitors of these programmes.

The Secretariat will go forward single-mindedly until we obtain our ultimate aim, the welfare of the people - Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims - in the plantation areas.

## 11. Thanks

The Secretariat thanks all the members groups and its friends, institutions or individuals for their co-operation during the period under review. The Secretariat thanks all those who provided the funds and solidarity for the work of the CSPA during the period. It feels confident that it will continue to receive such support.

(Sgd) **Ranjith de Silva**  
Secretary



## REPATRIATES TO ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord of July 29, 1987 states in clause 2.16D

"The Government of India will expedite repatriation from Sri Lanka of Indian citizens to India who are resident here, concurrently with the repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from Tamil Nadu".

The Government of India appears to be determined to invite a large number of repatriates from Sri Lanka. According to knowledgeable circles the number of persons to be repatriated is likely to be in the region of 250,000 persons or 50000 families. These repatriates will be travelling to India from January 1988 when shipping services between Talaimannar and Rameshwaram are to recommence. There are welcome changes in that a modern ship built in the Philippines with heavy tonnage and capacity to carry around 1000 persons, presently plying between Port Blair and Madras is to be operated in the Palk Strait for bringing repatriates and sending refugees. Our information is that it will be a modern vessel with all the facilities. Repatriation in 1988 therefore promises to be of different style or at least more modern. It will be a two way process—Indians to India and Sri Lankans to Sri Lanka. We hope that it will also mean that their rehabilitation on either side of the Palk Strait will bear comparison and will be different in implementation from what it is today.

During the last quarter of a century about 115,500 families have been repatriated to India and their rehabilitation is a sorry tale of failures in spite of the fact that the schemes of rehabilitation were well conceived and the financial allocation for the same were generous but they generated nothing but human misery and rampant corruption. To give examples, the number of persons who have been rehabilitated under what is called the 'Business Loan Scheme' is 75,305 accounting for 83.47 per cent of the repatriates. This scheme in fact is nothing more than getting rid of repatriate families with a throw away amount of Rs. 3,000/- as the first instalment and, for all practical purposes, the final instalment of the business loan. Nearly 95 per cent of those who have received these loans have run through the the money in a matter of months and found themselves as destitutes drifting towards the hills of Nilgiris, Anamalais and the Kodai hills where their life has been most unenviable! The land colonisation scheme is no more in operation. The State Farm Corporations have



been closed down. Purchase of private agricultural land scheme was virtually still born. The self-employment scheme is no longer in force. It may be said that only those who have been employed in the plantations and in the cooperative Spinning mills have been properly rehabilitated. Others have added to the wretchedness of the poor in India. In short, the Rehabilitation Schemes by and large floundered on bureaucratic bunglings. In the light of these unhappy experiences is the Home Ministry and the Department of Rehabilitation under it ready to receive the ceaseless flow of repatriates which would begin from January 1988?

The failures of the existing schemes, shrunk as they are today, demand a more meaningful scheme of rehabilitation of those whose life-style the two Governments are eager to undermine to serve their respective political goals!

We wish to submit that any new scheme of rehabilitation should be dovetailed to the development plans of the country. The Minister of Finance N. D. Tiwari has announced that the Government plans to double tea production. India produces around 60 crore kgs. of tea per annum. If this is to be doubled, it would require extensive opening of tea plantations in different parts of India.

Since the Lankan repatriates will almost all be skilled and experienced plantation workers their absorption in the new plantations should be the priority consideration in any rehabilitation scheme. Further the current curious practice of linking repatriation with unconnected events such as the return of refugees or the grant of citizenship to the stateless should be replaced by a meaningful correlation between the demand for labour in the new plantations and the arrival of repatriates to meet the demand. The emphasis henceforth should be on rehabilitation and not on the mere process of repatriation.

India is also planning to expand its rubber production. Being a rubber importing country, the Government has announced its policy of encouraging rubber plantations in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Forty four units have been developed in South, Mid and Little Andamans and Greater Nicobar. The Rubber Board has extended financial assistance of Rs. 80,000/- to the owners of 44 units. The Rubber Board is planning to bring about 1000 hectares of land under rubber plantations a year. This scheme itself provides a very promising potential for the employment of Sri Lanka repatriates in the rubber plantations of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.



We have been urging in the past, and we wish to urge now, that Sri Lankan repatriates must be settled in the proposed rubber plantations in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Rehabilitations authorities must work in close collaboration with the Rubber Board of India to achieve the process of rehabilitating the repatriates. It is also possible that Rubber Plantations may be expanded to Karnataka and in Kerala. There are plans for expansion of tea plantations in the Nilgiris and in Kodaikanal. These programmes of economic development provide ideal employment opportunities to Lankan repatriates.

We also urge that in a large undertaking like the rehabilitation of nearly 2.5 lakhs of repatriates which will be spread over a period of ten years, the Government should not bear the total responsibility all alone. Even if the Government is the only agency which can and must bear the major financial responsibility, it should meaningfully engage and enter into partnership with voluntary agencies for sharing the social and moral responsibilities for the proper rehabilitation of the Indian citizens who are to come under the terms of the Peace Accord and the various other agreements between India and Sri Lanka. Let us resolve not to let the dismal failures of the seventies and the eighties to be repeated in the nineties.

- courtesy, Exodus, 3:2, September 1987



## PLANTATION WORKERS AND THE PEACE ACCORD

( This Article was held over from the last issue for want of space: it therefore reflects the thinking of its authors in August—September 1987 )

The heavy veil of marginalization and deprivation that hung over the lives of the Plantation Workers for the past hundred years or more has been slowly but surely lifted in the recent past, thanks to the efforts of their Trade Unions, accredited leaders as well as the efforts of various Non-Governmental Organisations which educated the workers in respect of their human rights.

In this context the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement will hopefully usher "a distant dawn" for these under-privileged people too.



One section of the Agreement states as follows:- “acknowledging that Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and a multi-lingual plural society consisting, inter alia, of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims ( Moors ) and Burghers”.

This acknowledgement is an unqualified acceptance of the Tamil workers on the estates as part and parcel of our society. It gives them a name and habitation. It will thus be the task of all persons of good will to hasten the day when these people will be fully integrated into the mainstream of the body politic of our country.

Another section of the Agreement recognises that “each ethnic group has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity which has to be carefully nurtured.”

This recognition will surely gladden the hearts of not merely the plantation workers but all those who have worked assiduously for them and with them in the past.

Again another section of the Agreement states “...and preserving its character as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious plural society, in which all citizens, can live in equality, safety and harmony and prosper and fulfil their aspirations.”

Here too the frank recognition of the composition of our society and the assurance given of a sense of belonging to their country of adoption as well as the promise that their hopes and aspirations will shortly take the road to fulfilment will result in a discovery of their self-worth and establish them as an integral part of our society.

The Agreement also indicates the establishment of Provincial Councils with a Governor, a Chief Minister and One Board of Ministers, Conceding that at the present juncture the posts of Governor and Chief Minister will not be available to their representatives, yet one could envisage representation of these workers at the level of Board of Ministers of the Provincial Council. Such representation will surely strengthen their hand at the political level and help the achievement of the basic rights as embodied in the Agreement.

Article 2.18 recognises that “The Official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala. Tamil and English will also be official languages”. This section safe-guards their language rights and helps to strengthen the earlier



reference to distinct cultural and linguistic identity. It should also be noted that such promise goes further and states that this identity 'has to be carefully nurtured'.

In the recent past due to the ethnic conflict that engulfed Sri Lanka, quite a number of estate Tamils too have been displaced. Many have left for India through fear of violence. Others have left their estates where they worked and sought refuge in other areas of the country where they were less exposed to violence.

The Agreement assures such people that "necessary conditions to enable them to return to areas from where they were displaced will be created".

This assurance will be welcome news to all those workers who have been displaced from their original homes. Related to this assurance is also the promise of the Government of India to expedite the repatriation from Sri Lanka of Indian citizens to India. A large number of workers on the estates had opted for Indian citizenship in the recent past but they were unable to proceed to India partly because the Government of India did not cooperate in this effort due to the repercussions of the ethnic violence in the North and East of Sri Lanka. At least a 100,000 of Tamils from the North had sought refuge in Tamil Nadu. As a consequence the Government of India delayed the repatriation of Indian citizens from Sri Lanka. The resumption of the ferry service from Sri Lanka to India will help those estate workers who have opted for India to proceed to their land of choice. Incidentally such emigration will indirectly help those workers who have opted for Sri Lanka in the matter of employment and housing.

It is to be hoped that the aims and objectives of the Accord of the Indo Sri Lanka Agreement will be fulfilled to the "letter and spirit" as publicly announced by both president J. R. Jayawardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

In Ceylon's Tea Gardens the late Mr C. V. Velupillai outlines both the misery and the hopes of the workers on the tea plantations in the following poem.



And so the tom-toms throb,  
That for a hundred years  
In fettered darkness held  
My bronze bodied men  
Shall sound yet again  
From the mountain heights  
To the valley below  
With a clear  
With a a sure call.

The tears and the sweat  
That for the hundred years  
Scattered on the dust  
Gathered unto the night  
Of a risen sun  
Shall beget a million men  
To march upward and on  
To where great morning wait  
For the tom-tom's throb.

Though "C. V" as he was affectionately called did not experience the time and the day where "a million men from the tea estates will march upwards and on to where great mornings wait". We of this generation and the member groups of the CSPA may yet be privileged to share this experience.

— M. C. A. Alles & Y. Ranasinghe Rajapakse

### Postscript

Since this article was written a dark cloud has descended on the Peace Accord. A contributory factor has been the intransigence of a section of the militants and the subsequent military offence of the IPKF has worsened the situation. However the Hill country has so far been spared these experiences. It is to be hoped that the Trade Unions, Non-governmental Organizations, Religious bodies and others interested in the welfare of the people of this area will do their very best to persuade these people that their salvation does not lie with the bullet but through the democratic process.

There is a saying that every dark cloud has a silver lining and that hope springs eternal in the human breast. It is to be fervently hoped that this cloud will be no more in the near future and that our hopes for peace reconciliation and progress will be fulfilled before long.

— M. C. A. Alles & Y. Ranasinghe Rajapakse



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