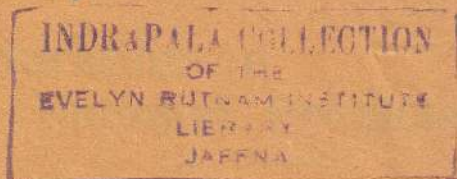


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11/19



# The National Question In Sri Lanka

Declaration of the XIth Congress  
of the  
Communist Party of Sri Lanka.

Price: Fifty Cents





# Declaration on Sri Lanka's National Problem

(Adopted by 11th C. P. S. L. Congress  
March 26-30th 1980)

The Communist Party of Sri Lanka declares that all communities in our multi-racial country have the right to live and work under conditions of equality, freely developing their languages, cultures and ethnic identities, and determining their own futures, free from any discrimination or harassment.

It condemns and opposes all forms of racism and advocates that the incitement of racial, religious or caste hatred should be a penal offence.

Our Party supports the just demands of Sri Lanka's minorities for equality and for the ending of the various discriminations and harassments they experience.

*We regard the struggle for a just solution of the problems the minorities experience as an integral part of the overall struggle of all the peoples of Sri Lanka for democratic and social progress.*

## HISTORY

Our country's history in this century has many examples to show how both imperialism and domestic feudal and capitalist reaction have used racism and the promotion of communal divisions and strife as a political weapon to protect their vested interests and continue their rule.

The imperialists fanned racial suspicion and animosities.

They played one community against the other as part of their basic strategy of "divide and rule". In this way, they delayed unduly the winning of political independence.

Even after political independence was won, a just solution of the problems of inter-communal relations has not been found. In many respects, the situation is worse than before.

Several lakhs of Up-country Tamils, the majority of whom are plantation workers who are either born in Sri Lanka or have lived here for many decades, and who contribute substantially to the production of our national wealth, have been rendered stateless by law and excluded from the democratic process.

Tamil-speaking people have been subjected, by law, in



administrative practice, and in social life to various discriminations, indignities and inequalities in their dealings with public authorities, and in their access to higher education, public employment, land, and trade.

Although a handful of the Sri Lanka Moors have been able to amass wealth through the gem trade and other speculative activities, the vast majority of this community still experience the educational and other historically-inherited disadvantages that have made their social development lag behind those of other communities.

## DETERIORATION

Nothing illustrates more vividly how inter-communal relations have deteriorated in recent times than the facts that the post-independence era has witnessed three major communal riots; that other imminent riots were narrowly averted; and that the Tamil minorities live in constant fear that riots may break out again.

*The deterioration in inter-communal relations has been a major impediment to the progress of Sri Lanka and its peoples.*

Apart from the loss of innocent lives and the destruction of public and personal property, communal tensions and clashes have led to periodic disruptions in nation-

al production, to the exodus abroad of many persons whose professional, scientific and technical skills the country needs; to even greater administrative inefficiency; and to needless restrictions on the access of all communities to higher, scientific and technical education.

Capitalist governments, both UNP and SLFP, in the post-independence period have used the deterioration in inter-communal relations to impose states of emergency and to introduce permanent laws that undermine the democratic rights that the people have won over decades of struggle. They have demonstrated more than once their inability and unwillingness to solve this problem, even though it impedes the social and economic progress of the country.

*The present UNP government of President J. R. Jayewardene surpasses all others in this regard.*

## RACISM

Both before and after political Independence, various colonial and capitalist governments, acting sometimes directly and sometimes through agents in the labour movement, have used racism as a means to attack the working class, divide its ranks, prevent the development of a united and militant working class movement, and do away with



fundamental trade union and democratic rights.

The working class can never forget how racism was used to destroy the early militant trade union movement of the 1920s: how Up-country Tamil plantation workers were disenfranchised and rendered stateless in order to stem the big advances made by the Left movement in the 1930s and early 1940s; how, under the influence of capitalist parties, trade unionism on racial and linguistic lines was fostered; and how, under the guise of stamping out communal violence and terrorism, basic working class and democratic rights such as demonstrations, peaceful picketing, strikes and other means by which the workers have defended themselves from exploitation have been attacked and often legally prohibited.

## CAPITALIST PATH - NO SOLUTION

*One of the main reasons why it has not been possible to solve this deteriorating problem in the post-Independence period is that all the governments of this period, whether UNP or SLFP, have basically followed a policy of trying to develop Sri Lanka on capitalist lines.*

Equality and justice for all communities in a multinational country cannot be achieved under capitalism. For this moribund social system, which

is already on its way out in human history, can exist only on the basis of the exploitation of man by man and nation by nation. That is why problems of communal discrimination and racist strife continue to plague all multi-racial capitalist countries of the contemporary world, including those that parade as parliamentary democracies.

In addition, the path of development followed by Sri Lanka's two main bourgeois political parties since Independence has been one of subordination to imperialism's international financial agencies like the World Bank, and accomodation towards their neo-colonialist strategy.

As a result, Sri Lanka's economy has remained basically stagnant and dependent, even though its population has more than doubled since World War II. Thus the competition for employment (especially in the public sector that had expanded considerably in the 1960s and 1970s) and for land, higher and scientific education, and state patronage, has become acute and provides ready fuel for reactionary forces anxious to ignite communal fires.

The Communist Party of Sri Lanka declares that no just or permanent solution to the problems of inter-communal relations can be found within the framework of capitalist relations or the



**policies of the capitalist parties.** The bankruptcy of the basic policies of the bourgeois parties and leaders among both Sinhalese and Tamils proves this.

The policy of forcible assimilation of the Tamil speaking minorities by compelling them to give up their language and culture and to accept those of the Sinhalese people has not produced national unity, as its adherents claimed. Instead, it has embittered the Tamils, encouraged fissiparous tendencies among them, and ended in a demand for the division of Sri Lanka into two separate states.

Equally, the current attempts to establish a spurious "national unity" by seeking forms of agreement with opportunist and capitalist elements among the Tamils in return for a subordinate share of governmental power and state patronage have not succeeded, as they leave untouched the vital interests and problems of the masses of all communities. This is why the UNP-Federal Party government of 1965 collapsed and why the attempts of the present UNP government to re-enact the situation are doomed to fail.

## **TAMIL CAPITALIST LEADERS**

The policies pursued by the capitalist leaders among the Sri Lanka Tamils have also ended in bankruptcy.

When British imperialism ruled Sri Lanka, these leaders sought to make use of its policy of "divide and rule" in order to obtain an equal share of the central administration in return for supporting the British colonialists in their opposition to demands for political freedom for the country. This was most dramatically expressed in the demand of the then-powerful Tamil Congress for "balanced representation" (fifty-fifty) and a permanent British presence in Sri Lanka.

When British imperialism came to terms with the Sinhalese bourgeois leaders of the UNP in 1948, the Tamil bourgeois leaders adopted the policy of using the political divisions in the Sinhalese areas to bargain with one or other bourgeois party in order to obtain what concessions they could in return for parliamentary support. Attempts to strengthen this bargaining power by electoral fronts with other parties of the Tamil-speaking minorities (e. g. the "All-Minorities Front" of the Tamil Congress in the Soulbury era, and the formation of the "Tamil United Liberation Front" before the 1977 general election) were part of this process.

But this strategy of the Tamil bourgeois leaders also failed as, after 1956, most governments had a sufficient majority in Parliament to rule



without their support. Consequently the "fronts" they had formed began to disintegrate as more and more unstable or opportunist elements capitulated to the inducements offered by the Sinhalese bourgeois leaders.

The collapse of the traditional strategies of the Tamil bourgeois leaders and the refusal of the bourgeois governments of the UNP and SLFP to grant their just demands has increased the frustrations among the mass of Sri Lanka Tamils, whose support the bourgeois Tamil leaders had enlisted by espousing their demands in regard to employment, land (especially in the state sponsored colonisation schemes) and trade. The petty-bourgeoisie, supported by militant sections of the youth, began to assume an increasingly important position within the TULF leadership. As opposed to the policy of accomodation with the UNP that the Tamil bourgeois leaders advocated, they demanded the creation of a separate state of Eelam and sought to obtain international support for its creation.

The fact that the expected international support did not materialise increased the moods of frustration and despair. While, on the one hand, sections of the petty-bourgeois forces in the TULF have tended to join with the bourgeois forces in the search

for forms of accomodation with the UNP government, a small section of radical youth began to seek an equally mistaken solution through resort to terrorism.

However, the crisis of bourgeois strategy and policies among the Tamils has also produced a positive and welcome radicalisation among sections of Tamil youth and certain petty-bourgeois Tamil leaders, which is expressed in the growing interest in scientific socialism and acceptance of the fact that it alone has provided permanent solutions to national problems; in growing interest in the socialist countries and support for their policies; and in growing realisation of the need to develop relations of friendship and cooperation with Left forces in the South of Sri Lanka.

## SIMILAR

A similar bankruptcy and crisis has been manifested in the policies and strategies of the bourgeois leaders over the question of the Up-country Tamils.

This is seen in the failure of the UNP's Citizenship Acts and the SLFP's Indo-Sri Lanka Agreements to solve this problem over the past 3 decades.

Based on a so-called theory of an "absorbable maximum" and substituting agreements



with bourgeois governments in India for a settlement based on discussions with the organisations of the Up-country Tamils themselves, the policy of the bourgeois parties has not merely failed to end the "statelessness" of several lakhs of Up-country Tamils but even created new categories of "stateless persons".

The bourgeois leadership of the Ceylon Workers Congress, which first tried to enlist the support of bourgeois forces in India to gain its objectives, has also chosen to join forces with the UNP once these attempts did not succeed. But apart from minor concessions, the entry of the C. W. C. into the UNP Cabinet has not, and cannot, change the unjust and subordinate position to which the Up-country Tamils have been reduced, both as workers and as a national minority.

## ONLY UNDER SOCIALISM

*The Communist Party of Sri Lanka declares that no solution to the problems of the national minorities in our country can be found by the leadership of the bourgeois parties, of both majority and minority communities, or through their policies.*

Our Party considers that the working class forces in our country must advance their own solutions to the problems

of the national minorities and win support for them among all progressive and democratic sections of the majority community and the minorities.

This is essential not only in the interests of social justice but also in order to strengthen the struggle to defend living standards and democratic rights from the attacks of the capitalist parties and their growing authoritarianism, and also in order to establish a real alternative of Left and democratic forces, led by a united working class, that will take Sri Lanka forward to socialism.

History has shown convincingly that it is only under socialism, where all exploitative relations between peoples are abolished, that both social and national problems can be solved permanently.

*The fight for a just and lasting solution of the problems of national minorities in Sri Lanka must therefore go hand in hand with the overall struggle to break out of the capitalist framework imposed by the bourgeois leaders and parties and to advance towards socialist society.*

## C. P. S. L. PROPOSALS

Basing itself on the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, on scientific communism, the Communist Party of Sri Lanka



states its own proposals in this matter.

As the party of the working class, our Party takes its fundamental stand on the internationalism of the proletariat, on the need for the fundamental unity of all working people in the struggle for their common interests, irrespective of differences of nationality, caste or religion. We uphold the principle of unity, friendship and brotherhood between peoples of different nationalities and ethnic communities in the same way as we do their equality.

Our Party seeks to give expression to this principle, which transcends all others in inter-communal relations, by seeking to build the unity of the workers of all communities of our country in common class organisations and in solidarity with the working people of all other countries, thereby helping to forge their common class identity and solidarity.

At the same time, our Party accepts and upholds another fundamental principle of Marxism-Leninism—namely the right of all nations to self-determination, including, their right, if they so desire, to form their own state.

In seeking a solution to the problems of the Sri Lanka Tamils, our Party proceeds from the basic position that

national exploitation is a by-product of the exploitation of man by man, which is the dominant characteristic of the capitalist system. We are convinced that socialism alone can guarantee the Tamil nationality its fundamental national rights. Therefore, we believe that the struggles of of the Sri Lanka Tamils for their fundamental rights should be waged in close liasion with the struggle of all the working people of Sri Lanka for a socialist path of development. For these reasons, we consider that the demand for the division of Sri Lanka into two states is detrimental to the interests of both the working class and the oppressed minorities of Sri Lanka.

Therefore, while accepting the right of the Tamil nationality to self-determination, *our Party proposes that this right should be exercised through implementing the principle of regional autonomy within a unitary state.* This, we are convinced, will strengthen the unity of the working people of all nationalities of our country in their struggles for national and social liberation.

While Communists working among the Sinhalese masses advocate the acceptance of the right of the Tamil nationality to self-determination, Communists who work among the Tamil masses stress the need to find forms of expressing this right to self-determinat-



ion without dividing Sri Lanka into separate states.

As a means of restoring unity between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities and achieving their fraternal co-operation in the overall struggle for the vital interest of the masses, and for democratic rights, social progress and socialism, our Party advocates:—

- (1) Common acceptance and application of the principle of regional autonomy, with provision for setting up one or more autonomous regions in the Northern and Eastern areas of Sri Lanka, according to the wishes of the peoples of these areas; and with the right for such autonomous regions to amalgamate, if they so desire;
- (2) The guarantee that every citizen of Sri Lanka will have the right to deal with, and be dealt with, in his own language by the government and the courts; as well as the right to live and work in any part of the country.

Our Party is convinced that, once these guiding principles are accepted, it will not be difficult to work out, through mutual and friendly discussions, details regarding the powers and functions of the autonomous regions, their relations with the central administration, and the res-

pective ways in which Sinhala and Tamil, which are both national languages of Sri Lanka, will be used in the central government and the autonomous regions.

## ACCEPTANCE

Our Party is happy that there is growing acceptance in the Left movement and among the minorities of the correctness of its proposals regarding self-determination for the Sri Lanka Tamils and its expression through regional autonomy. It is certain that if the Left parties actively and unitedly campaign for these principles, even broader acceptance of them can be achieved.

Our Party also fights actively, and urges all other Left and democratic forces to do the same, against all discriminations which people from the national minorities experience in fields such as education, employment and social benefits provided by the state. This includes disadvantages that arise from discriminatory interpretation and application of the laws regarding the official language and citizenship.

We oppose all attempts to suppress agitation for the redress of the just grievances of the minorities through states of emergency, draconian laws, or the use of the armed services of the state for repression or for occupation of their terri-



stories. It is through winning the confidence of the national minorities and through respect for the voluntary principle that a solution to inter-communal relations can be reached, and not by force or threats of force.

## UP—COUNTRY TAMILS

In regard to the Up-country Tamils, our Party advocates that:-

- (1) All persons, who have applied for Sri Lanka citizenship under the 1964 and 1974 Indo-Sri Lanka agreements, but who were not registered as such before the agreements lapsed should immediately be given Sri Lanka citizenship.
- (2) All other stateless persons of Indian origin resident in Sri Lanka should be given a definite date before which they should apply for Sri Lankan or Indian citizenship, and those who apply for Sri Lankan citizenship should be given such citizenship; and
- (3) Discussions should be held with the government of India to evolve a scheme whereby both those persons who applied for Indian citizenship under the 1964 and 1974 agreements and are still in Sri Lanka, and those

others who apply for Indian citizenship under the new opportunity provided, are accepted as Indian citizens and can return to India at retiring age or at any earlier time that they voluntarily decide to do so.

All necessary steps should be taken to see that those who become Sri Lankans are able to do so on a basis of equality with other citizens. In this connection, all estate schools and dispensaries should be incorporated into the national systems of education and health, and the "line" system under which these people are segregated on estates should be abolished and replaced by proper housing that corresponds to the needs of settled communities.

The Up-country Tamils, the majority of whom are plantation workers, constitute a great source of strength for the working class of our country. In addition to ending their exclusion from the democratic process, the separation (introduced by the bourgeois leaders) that exists between them and the rest of the organised working class movement should be speedily ended. They should be more and more associated in common struggles and common class organisations with the mainstream of the working class movement.

In regard to the Sri Lanka Moors, our Party solidarises with the progressive movements among the youth and intelligensia of this community that are developing under the influence of the spectacular advances made by the Muslim populations in the Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union under the socialist system, and as a result of their feelings of solidarity with the anti-imperialist struggles of the Arab and other Muslim peoples.

We support the efforts of these forces to make common cause with the Left and democratic movements of this country against the domination of the community by capitalist leaders, and also against the attempts of both imperialism and its Maoist allies to blunt their anti-imperialism by diverting it into bigotry or anti-socialist positions.

Our Party advocates that, due to the historically-inherit-

ed educational and other disadvantages from which the Sri Lanka Moors still suffer, special national arrangements should be made, (especially in the access to higher education) to enable them to overcome these disadvantages as rapidly as possible.

The cultural rights, as well as the religious beliefs and customs, of other small interspersed minorities that have lived in Sri Lanka for several generations, should also be respected.

The Communist Party of Sri Lanka appeals to all Left and democratic forces, both among the Sinhalese people and the national minorities, to come together in support of such a programme that can not only help to replace racial suspicions and animosities with feelings of mutual trust; but also unite all Left and democratic forces in the fight against neo-colonialism and capitalist domination and for a bright socialist future.





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