

MANOEUVRES OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM IN CEYLON
[ON THE QUESTION OF GRANTING CEYLON THE STATUS OF A BRITISH DOMINION]

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Situated close to the peninsula of Hindustan on the sea routes linking Europe to the countries of S.E. Asia and the Far East, Ceylon occupies an important strategic position in the Indian Ocean. During the Second World War Ceylon played a big role as a strategic spring-board for the Anglo-Americans in S.E. Asia.

The area of Ceylon is 70,000 sq. kilometres; the number of its population, according to the figures for 1946, is 6,658,899 people.¹ The population of the island is not uniform in national composition and in religious affiliations. It is particularly important to note this, since the disunity of the different national and religious groups in Ceylon serves as a favourable basis for the implementation of the basic principle of British colonial policy: “divide and rule.” The British colonisers are artificially setting the different national groupings one against another and are diverting their attention from the struggle against British imperialism.

The population of Ceylon consists in the main of Singalese (nearly 4 million), Tamilians (nearly 1.5 million), Maoris (nearly 400,000), and the so-called burgers (nearly 40,000), the descendants of the assimilated Dutch colonisers who ruled over Ceylon from 1658 till 1795. The oldest among the dwellers of the islands, Vedda, only consist altogether of a few thousands. Europeans in Ceylon (in the main British) number 11,000.

The division of the population into religious groups almost coincides with its ethnical division. The religion of the Singalese is Buddhism, of the Tamils—Hinduism (Shivism), of the Maoris and Malays—Islam. Christianity, in the main in the form of Catholicism, began to be forcibly implanted already in the beginning of the 16th century by the Portuguese who were the first European invaders of Ceylon. The present-day class structure of the population of Ceylon is characterised by a preponderance of the small peasantry, of which a great part rents land on the basis of share-cropping from local semi-feudal landlords and Buddhist monasteries. But the main and the best part of the land was seized by the British for their plantations. Alongside the British bourgeoisie from the beginning of the twentieth century, there gradually grew a national bourgeoisie. In this period little by little a national proletariat was formed and consolidated. Thanks to its class consciousness and organisation after the Second World War the working class became a serious force, playing a conspicuous role in the political life of Ceylon and in the leadership of the national-liberation struggle of the people of Ceylon.

Ceylon’s economy is a typically colonial economy. Commanding positions are in the hands of the British. In 1933 there were 193 European (predominantly British) companies with a capital of 702 million rupees, out of which 488 million rupees were invested in plantations. There were also large investments of other foreign and, in particular, of American capital.

British imperialism converted Ceylon into an agrarian and raw-material appendage of the metropolitan country whose monopolies subordinated the economic development of the island to their own interests. But, developing for the most part the production of industrial crops, the British colonisers showed entirely no care for the urgent needs of the population. The production of tea, rubber and cocoanut for export did away with other agricultural crops. Food-stuffs were imported from other countries, mainly from India. The surplus of cheap labour-power—in particular of Indian coolies—and the regime of the most savage exploitation of the native workers is enabling the planters to extract colossal profits. To this day, forced labour is employed in the plantations. The native workers and peasants live in perpetual misery.

¹ Statesman Yearbook, 1947, p. 181.

Till the Second World War the product of the plantations in Ceylon was imported into Britain and the countries of the British Empire. As a consequence of the general weakening of the position of British imperialism during the war and after it the role of the USA in the external trade of Ceylon increased sharply. And in spite of the fact that trade with the countries of the British Empire still retains first place in the external trade balance of Ceylon, still its share is decreasing while the share of the USA is gradually increasing. While the share of Britain in the import of Ceylon in 1938 consisted of 21 per cent and in 1946 of 19 per cent, the share of the USA in import in 1938 was equal to 2 per cent and in 1945 already 13 per cent. Britain's share in the export of Ceylon reached 54 per cent, occupying the second place after Britain.

The lop-sided nature of economic development of Ceylon is also demonstrated in the fact that British capital has not developed industry to any considerable extent, even the reworking of local raw material. In spite of the diversity of minerals in the soil of Ceylon, mining industry was practically absent.

It was only during the Second World War, when the industry of the metropolitan country was reorganised on a war basis and Britain had to reduce her export sharply, industry began developing partially in Ceylon and in the main light industry—textile, footwear and food-stuffs. In this industry the capital of the national bourgeoisie of Ceylon is beginning to play a big role side by side with British capital. American capital has also struck root here and is not without success.

The development of industry as a result of the war situation led to an immeasurable growth in the incomes of the capitalists and feudal landowners of Ceylon. At the same time the position of the toiling masses deteriorated sharply as a result of the intensified exploitation, the rise in prices and fall in the standard of real wages. Thus the index of the cost of living, even according to the official minimised figures, rose from 110 in 1939 to 129 in 1941, to 183 in 1942 and to 204 in 1944.

In the first place the one-sided development of Ceylon's economy tells upon the toiling population of the island. This manifested itself particularly during the Second World War (1939-1945) when less number of products of nourishment and articles of wide consumption were imported and the partial development of local light industry did not cover the requirements. The growth of impoverishment along with the intensification of the exploitation of the industrial and plantation workers, the dockers and the poor peasantry evoked a wave of economic and political strikes.

The fall in the "boom" caused by the war situation led to a still greater intensification of the exploitation of the toilers, to a still greater growth of prices, to an increase in the index of the cost of living, to the growth of unemployment, to the further impoverishment of the toiling masses and to a deterioration in their living standards. Thus, according to a *Reuter* report dated 2nd Feb. 1949, as a result of the strikes in the rubber industry of Ceylon, 200,000 workers of this branch of industry are constantly menaced by unemployment. The trade balance of Ceylon is deteriorating. For example in 1946, the value of exports consisted of 265 per cent (1938 = 100) and the value of imports 423 per cent.

The economic changes, taking place in Ceylon during the years of the Second World War, had a serious influence on the general political situation in the island.

The most important happenings in the course of the war were the change in the correlation of class forces in Ceylon and the advance of the national-liberation movement. The intensification of the class struggle and the growth of the national-liberation movement are the basic factors characterising the present-day political life of Ceylon. The numerical growth of the working class and its organisational and political consolidation are converting it at the present time into a great political force, heading the struggle against the foreign domination, the local landlords and the big bourgeoisie. While the working class is more and more winning a leading role in the national-liberation movement, the Ceylonese bourgeoisie, not to speak

of the landlord and clerical circles, is deserting the struggle for national independence by selling the country and entering into an agreement with British and American imperialists against its own people.

There are several political parties in Ceylon. The communist Party was formed as an organisation in July 1942 out of the United Socialist Party of Ceylon formed in 1940. Coming forward under the slogans of the nationalisation of the property of the British capitalists (mills, plantations, banks, etc.), The immediate withdrawal of British troops and the transfer of all British military bases from Ceylon, and by demanding the implementation of genuinely democratic transformation it rapidly gained authority amongst the broad masses of the toiling population and, in particular, amongst the industrial and plantation workers and the poor peasantry. The Communist Party has a powerful influence in the Federation of Trade Unions. The leaders of the Party are its General Secretary, Peter Kueneman, and Vaidialingam, The General Secretary of the Federation of Trade Unions.² The Communist Party has its representatives in the parliament of Ceylon. The leader of the Communist fraction in the parliament is the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ceylon, Peter Kueneman. The Communist Party of Ceylon, in its struggle for leadership of the toiling masses, is systematically exposing the Trotskyites, who are carrying out undermining work directed towards the splitting of the working-class movement of Ceylon. The Trotskyites have at present entrenched themselves in the Lanka Sama Samaj Party. This party, which was formed in 1935, in the beginning united the various political trends in the working-class movement. In 1939, there was a split and the revolutionary elements went out of it. The leaders of the Lanka Samaj, who demagogically play upon the nationalistic and anti-British slogans, are in essence the servitors and agents of imperialism and are attempting to rely upon the backward sections of plantation workers, a section of the unemployed intelligentsia and different declassed elements. They are bringing about a split in the ranks of the working class, disorganising the democratic movement and disrupting the anti-imperialist struggle of the toilers of Ceylon.

To the category of bourgeois-nationalist parties belong the ultra Right party of the Sinhala Maha Sabha, which is linked with the feudal, clerical and bourgeois circles and which is attempting to subject the masses to its leadership on the basis of the common allegiance to Buddhist religion; The Ceylon National Congress which is a moderate reformist party of the Singalese bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia; the Muslim League of Ceylon, and the Malaya League.

These parties were formed in 1946 in “United National Party (UNP) under the presidentship of the leader of the Ceylon National Congress, the British agent Stephen Senanayake. The UNP is the compromising bourgeois reformist party, which is hiding behind the slogans of “unification of all national groups of the island” and “the development of the well-being and progress of the masses.” By utilising the support of the British imperialists and being a party of the parliamentary and government majority, the UNP is carrying out a pro-British internal and external policy.

The British authorities, which come down with all the means at their disposal on the toiling masses and in particular upon the working class and its Communist Party, are attempting to support Ceylon’s reactionary bourgeoisie and the feudal landowners, where such support does not damage the interests of the British imperialists. By giving formal concessions to the bourgeois-nationalist parties of Ceylon, the British imperialists are attempting at the same time to raise their authority in the eyes of the masses and to depict them as fighters against British imperialism.

The parliamentary elections in September 1947, which were carried out under the “supervision” of the British authorities, gave a comparative predominance in the parliament to the United National Party (UNP), from among whose representatives in the main the present government of Ceylon has been formed.

² The Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions joined the World Federation of Trade Unions and is continuing to remain in it, in spite of the disruptive activities of the Anglo-American agents in the World Federation of Trade Unions.

It is clear that by resorting to “indirect rule” and keeping themselves in the background, the British can feel themselves secure behind the back of a government which is composed of the representatives of the reactionary bourgeoisie of Ceylon.

In the course of the entire history of the domination of British imperialism in Ceylon one can follow the line of artificially fomenting national and religious enmity and of compromising with the reactionary strata of Ceylon in order that imperialism should maintain its rule. On their part, the landlords and the big bourgeoisie have readily entered and are entering into a compromise with the bourgeoisie of Britain, of the oppressor country, for the sake of retaining their “rights” in the share of the exploitation of the toiling masses.

The growth of national consciousness and the advance of the national movements registered during the First World War in a number of colonial and dependent countries, also took place in Ceylon.

The Great October Socialist Revolution had great influence upon the development of the national-liberation movement in Ceylon. The rising proletariat activated the struggle against the British invaders and the local bourgeoisie. The formation of political organisations here takes place precisely at this time. A number of liberal, bourgeois-reformist organisations were formed during this period—the Ceylon League of Reform, the National Association of Ceylon, and the Ceylon National Congress. These organisations, whose leadership was seized by the propertied classes of Ceylon, demanded from the British the carrying out of administrative reforms, which, while not affecting the basis of British domination, would extend the rights of the national bourgeoisie of Ceylon. The struggle and the demands of the working class strengthened the positions of these organisations, which attempted to draw over the toiling masses to their side in order to later betray them. The growth of national consciousness and the intensification of the anti-British sentiments forced the British to come to an agreement with the bourgeois-landlord top stratum. The result was the reforms in colonial administration of 1920 and 1923. These reforms did not broach upon the national and military principles of domination of British imperialism. They hampered the national-liberation movement for the time being but were not able to stop it. The sharpening of national and class contradictions in the period of the world economic crisis at the beginning of the thirties of the twentieth century compelled British imperialism to seek for a more stable alliance with the national bourgeoisie in order to dupe the broad masses of the people. The Donmor Commission, which was widely advertised by the British and which worked out the Constitution of 1931 (known as the “Donmor Constitution”) had to achieve this aim.

But even the Donmor Constitution led to only partial changes in the form of the British rule in Ceylon and it too did not broach upon the economic, political and military basis of British domination.

The predominance of the Singalese in the State Council evoked discontent on the part of the backward national groups and, in particular, the Tamils. Dissatisfaction in the regime of British rule appeared in the State Council itself which was composed of persons carefully selected by the British from the native top stratum of Ceylon. The reform of 1931 did not stop the growth of the national-liberation struggle against the British power. The British Government was forced to admit that the Donmor Constitution machinations did not pay.

The Second World War and the great liberation struggle of the USSR against German and Japanese imperialism inspired the peoples of the colonial and dependent countries. The struggle of these peoples against Hitler fascism and Japanese imperialism which assumed a broad anti-imperialist character, compelled the British imperialists to resort to new manoeuvres in Ceylon also. The sharp weakening of the positions of Britain in the Far East and S.E. Asia, which manifested itself in the beginning of the war, compelled the British imperialists to promise reforms to their colonies in Asia. Side by side with the promises made to India already in September 1941, the Churchill government was forced to declare that

the question of self-rule of Ceylon would be considered at the end of the war. On May 26, 1943 the British Minister for Colonies, Commander Oliver Stanley, declared that the British Government was considering the question of future reforms, with the aim of creating “a fully responsible government” in Ceylon.

In July 1944 a commission was formed, under the presidentship of Salisbury, which concluded its work only towards the end of 1945.³ The new constitution of Ceylon, which in the main is in operation even now, was proclaimed on May 15, 1946.

The constitution of 1946, like the preceding act of the British imperialists, did not touch the basis of British rule in Ceylon and brought about only formal changes. The press of the metropolitan country and the pro-British press of Ceylon are trying to depict the regime established by this constitution as a most important change in the life of Ceylon.

However, an analysis of the constitution of May 15, 1946 shows that this is not the case at all. A British Governor is at the head of the government of Ceylon. Formally he fulfils his functions in conformity with the opinions of the corresponding Ministers, except in “extraordinary cases”, and seemingly he does not interfere in the activities of the government, although in actual fact he affects a real guardianship over it. The Governor is directly subordinate to the British Government (in the person of the Minister for Colonies), which thus retain its power in Ceylon. Questions of defence and foreign relations of the island, of foreign trade, questions connected with changes in the constitution and regarding the national and religious minorities are under the direct control of the Governor. Besides, the British Government had the right (till the granting of Dominion Status to Ceylon in 1948) to suspend or to revoke the constitution “when the necessity arose”.

The executive authority is implemented by a Cabinet of Ministers. The Prime Minister is appointed by the Governor from amongst the members of parliament, who enjoy the support of the majority in the parliament. The rest of the ministers are also appointed by the Governor on the representation of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister must necessarily be at the same time also the Minister for Defence and Foreign Affairs. The Ministers have their own Parliamentary Secretaries. According to the constitution of 1946, the Ceylon Government is formally “a fully responsible government” in the matter of “internal civil administration”, but the questions relating to foreign policy, as already pointed out above, are openly under the control of the British authorities.

According to the constitution of 1946, a parliament consisting of two houses—an Upper House, the Senate, and a Lower House, the House of Representatives—was created.

The Senate is composed of 30 Senators, out of whom 15 are nominated by the Governor and 15 are elected by the House of Representatives on the principle of proportional representation. People who have attained the age of 35 can become Senators. Although the Senate cannot reject the adoption of a law, it has the right to delay it (the so-called “suspension veto”). Formally the Senate enjoys legislative initiative on all questions, with the exception of questions relating to finance. The term of office of Senators is fixed for 6 years. Every two years, one-third of the composition of the Senate renewed. As a whole the Senate is called upon to serve as one of the vehicles of British policy in Ceylon.

The House of Representatives consists of 101 members, out of which 95 are elected and 6 appointed by the Governor. The term of office is 5 years.

The scope of the parliament is restricted to questions of internal civil administration, with the exception of questions which fall within the scope of the British parliament. Apropos this the parliament of

³ Ceylon Report of the Commission Constitutional Reform, Cmd. 6,677, London, HMSO.

Ceylon is obliged to proceed from the principle of the supremacy of imperialist (British) legislation and cannot decide questions relating to the revision of the constitution. Thus, the British parliament is provided with the right of issuing laws for Ceylon “in special cases”.

With respect to the electoral system the 1946 constitution retains in the main the principles of the Donmor Constitution, with the exception of the change in the principle of representation. Under the guise of a quest for a compromise solution on the norms of representation of the different national groups in the parliament, the 1946 constitution confuses and complicates the problem still more with the aim of setting these groups against one another.

The introduction of the 1946 constitution retained the commanding position in the hands of the British and did not change in essence the situation in Ceylon.

The revolutionary struggle in China, Viet-Nam, India, Burma and other countries of East Asia strengthened the influence of democratic elements amongst the population of Ceylon. The demands for a change in the political condition of the island became more insistent.

Under conditions when the national-liberation struggle in all the colonies of S.E. Asia was growing, when the Chinese people were successfully struggling against American imperialism and the reactionary regime of Chiang Kai-shek supported by it—under such conditions Ceylon acquired exceptional value for British imperialism as a big strategic springboard. According to the calculations of the British imperialists, the consolidation of the political positions of the local bourgeoisie and the feudal circles in Ceylon could render substantial assistance to the imperialist camp in suppressing the anti-imperialist struggle not merely in Ceylon but also in other colonies and, above all, in India. Therefore, almost simultaneously with the implementation of the insidious “Mountbatten Plan” on the granting of “independence” to India, the British Government declared on June 18, 1947 that it was going to adopt measures with the object of changing the constitution of 1946 in the direction of “granting Ceylon self-rule within the bounds of the British Commonwealth of Nations”, as soon as agreements, satisfactory to both the sides (i.e., British imperialism), were concluded.

On November 11, 1947 the British authorities concluded with Ceylonese reaction: i) “Treaty on Defence” ii) “Treaty Relating to Foreign Relations”, iii) “Treaty on Position of State Officials.” It was only after this that Ceylon was granted Dominion Status.

These treaties completely preserve the authority of British imperialism over Ceylon and reduce to empty formality all the provisions of the Act about granting Dominion Status to it in which it is said that “the prerogative vested in it by His Majesty with respect to the promulgation of laws for Ceylon relating to questions of defence and foreign relations are hereby cancelled.”⁴

After a grandiloquent preamble, Article I of the treaty on defence says that the Government of Britain and Ceylon will render mutual military assistance and with this aim “the Government of the United Kingdom can retain bases for its naval and air forces and to retain its land military forces on the territory of Ceylon.” In Article II the Government of Ceylon is obliged “to render to the Government of the United Kingdom any assistance needed” including “the utilisation of naval and air bases, ports and military constructions, and the utilisation of means of communication.” The British armed forces on the territory of Ceylon enjoy extra-territorial rights. The treaty retains “the right of tribunals and administrative authorities (British—S. Pokrovsky) to exercise over the members of the above-mentioned forces the same control and to extend its jurisdiction in the same way as it is exercised at present.” The British have the right to train the armed forces of Ceylon and to supply weapons to Ceylon. Moreover, British officers and instructors are

⁴ Cmd. 7,257, 1947, London, HMSO.

directing the military forces of Ceylon and the Ceylon Government has agreed “to establish such administrative organisation, which it will be desirable ... for their cooperation in questions relating to defence and for co-ordinating and defining their respective needs in this sphere.

Senanayake appointed an Englishman, Count Keitness, as commander-in-chief of the armed forces of Ceylon. In the summer of 1949 the British Navy carried out manoeuvres along with the Indian and Ceylonese forces. Thus, we may say, the Anglo-Singalese “Defence Treaty” is still more converting Ceylon into one of the cogs of the British imperialist military machine.

The treaty relating to the State officials of the Ceylon Government made it obligatory for Ceylon to retain all the British officials in the posts occupied by them earlier, and to pay them for leave, sickness, pension, etc.

The treaty relating to foreign relations strengthened Ceylon’s complete dependence on Britain in this matter. According to Article I of this treaty the Government of Ceylon has agreed “to ratify and fulfil the decisions of the preceding Empire conferences.” On the basis of a purely formal equality, Ceylon and Great Britain are exchanging their representatives known as High Commissioners. The treaty directly lays it down that the external relations of Ceylon with foreign countries must be effected through the British Government. In case the Government of Ceylon desires to exchange diplomatic representatives with any other foreign state, it can do so by virtue of Article IV of the treaty only through the medium of the British Government.

Having retained its dominating position in Ceylon in economic, political and military respects and after consolidating it by means of the treaties mentioned, British imperialism granted Ceylon the status of British Dominion on February 4, 1948.

The conversion of Ceylon into “a self-ruling state within the bounds of the British Commonwealth of Nations” did not change the essence of the British colonial policy in Ceylon, did not alter the position of Ceylon as a colony of British imperialism, but merely changed the form of subjection. In connection with this “knavish compromise of the greatest magnitude” the Labourite pupils of the hardened British imperialist Disraeli will do well to recall the words of the latter that “colonies do not cease to be colonies because they are independent.” Although Ceylon, like India and Pakistan, is now represented at Empire conferences along with other Dominions, it is still regarded as before—a colony and a dominion of a lower order than the “British”. The corrupt ruling top stratum of Ceylon is not even outwardly in opposition now; it serves its British masters.

It is no accident that the Anglo-American imperialists, “contrary to reason” and against all the rules of admission to the United Nations Organisation, are persistently endeavouring to drag in Ceylon as a member of the UNO. Again, in Article V of the Anglo-Ceylon agreement relating to foreign relations mentioned above, the British Government has assumed the “obligation” “to render all support to any request on the part of Ceylon to enter into the United Nations Organisation, or into any special international institution defined by Article 57 of the UNO Constitution.”

By following their policy of dictates on solving questions of international relations, the Anglo-American representatives in the Security Council slyly attempted to carry out the decision about the entry of Ceylon into the UNO—hoping to add (to “the majority subservient to it”) the vote of one more satellite. The Soviet representative was entirely right in demanding that the consideration of the question of Ceylon’s entry to the membership of the UNO be deferred till additional information on the situation in Ceylon was received.

“Instead, on the insistence of the representatives of the USA and Britain, the question was put to vote and the Soviet representative voted against the attempts to examine this question in spite of the fact that he had asked only for one thing—the postponement of this question for some time till additional information on the political status of Ceylon was received.” (A. Y. Vyshinsky, speech delivered in Special Political Committee on November 30, 1948, and printed in *Pravda* in the issue of December 3, 1948.)

Knowing that their trick did not succeed, the Anglo-Americans and their lackeys in various countries, including Ceylon, raised a slanderous uproar round this question. They tried to even accuse the Soviet Union of misusing the right of “veto” and to insinuate that the USSR was the impediment in the way of Ceylon’s entry into the UNO. It is, however, well known that the Soviet Union fights against the discriminatory attitude of the Anglo-American bloc towards the People’s Democratic States, which have no less, if not greater, justification for being admitted in the UNO.

The events of the recent period show that the reactionary ruling circles of Ceylon are trying to include Ceylon into various “regional” groupings of countries, serving as an appendage of the North Atlantic Union and embodying the claims of the USA to domination over the entire world. The representatives of Ceylon took part in the conference of the group of countries of Asia and the Far East which took place in Delhi in January 1949, where, apart from the Indonesian question, there was also discussed the question of forming a grouping of those countries of S.E Asia which were under Anglo-American control. Not content with the projects inspired by them for forming groupings of the countries of S.E. Asia, the Anglo-American instigators of war are attempting to form a “Pacific Bloc” comprising the countries of the British Empire as well as the countries not within the Empire. According to the reports of the Australian newspapers, the British representatives had conducted negotiations with Pakistan, India, Ceylon, S. Africa and Canada, for the conclusion of a Pacific Pact.

In these criminal plans, the Anglo-American instigators of war do not want to realise

“that it is one thing to construct all sorts of groupings and to be collecting signatures to more and more pacts cooked up in the chancelleries of the American State Department and British Foreign Office, and an entirely different thing to really achieve the ends pursued by the inspirers of such groupings and pacts”. (*Statement of the USSR Foreign Ministry on North Atlantic Pact*)

The Anglo-American band-masters of the Senanayake government are trying in vain to present the voice of their lackey, Ceylonese reaction, as the voice of the peoples of Ceylon, since

“it goes without saying that the servile attitude of certain leading persons in the governments of these countries will not suffice for the people of Asia to consent to embark on the slippery path on to which they are being persistently goaded by the Powers which have become entangled in colonial affairs and by their wealthy patrons” (*Ibid.*)

This statement also applies entirely to Ceylon, since in Ceylon as well as in the other countries of the East, a mighty upsurge of the national-liberation movement is taking place. The mass meetings of the toiling people of Ceylon which were held on May 1, 1949, took place under the slogan of “Unity With the Workers of the Whole World in the Struggle Against Imperialism and Capitalist Exploitation.”