

## **The National Question in Ceylon (1944)**

*After 1953 the onset of Khrushchevism was associated across the globe with the termination of the Marxist approach on the national question in multi-national countries. So far as Sri Lanka is concerned apart from the Marxist-Leninist forces almost all major 'left' forces adopted Sinhala chauvinism as the axis of their policies including the Communist Party of Ceylon and the JVP. The document below is part of a body of documents on the national question which were produced by the communist party during the independence movement.*

### **Memorandum on a Federal Constitution submitted to the Working Committee of the Ceylon National Congress at its Request by Pieter Keunemanan, A. Vaidialingam of the Ceylon Communist Party, October 1944**

The Working Committee of the Ceylon National Congress, at its meetings on October 16, requested us to elaborate further the views and principles expressed in the second resolution of the Ceylon Communist Party in the printed sheet attached. We were further asked to send this memorandum to the members of the Working Committee in time to allow for a discussion on it at the next Working Committee meeting on Monday, October 23.

#### Multi-National Development

1. The first point of departure of our resolution is the recognition of the fact that in Ceylon there are and will be several nationalities.
2. We regard a nation as a historical, as opposed to an ethnographical, concept. It is a historically-evolved, stable community of people, living in a contiguous territory as their traditional homeland, speaking a common language, having a common economic life and a common psychological make-up, manifested in a community of culture. In the light of the above definition, we recognise that the Sinhalese and Tamil people, for example constitute distinct nationalities.
3. Historically, in the early period of capitalism, the development of nationalities coincided with the formation of centralized states, e.g., France, Italy and other countries in western Europe where different tribes coalesced into a single-nation state, with a common language. In Eastern Europe and elsewhere such development was not possible. Here capitalism developed later and centralized states were already in existence before nationalities could develop into their own. Thus we find the phenomenon of multi-national states, based on the leading position of one nationality and the subjection of the rest, e.g., Hungary, Yugoslavia, Tsarist Russia or colonial countries like India and Ceylon where British imperialism forcibly established a centralized state.
4. The development of capitalism and the democratic and anti-imperialist awakening in the whole world makes the national problem a burning one in the multi-national states. Here the developing nationalities come into conflict with the existing centralized state, which forcibly

holds back their national consolidation and development. The problem therefore arises of organising a multi-national state which will eliminate national oppression or discrimination and unify the nationalities, guaranteeing to each full and free development. The problem in Ceylon is, therefore, how to unify the different nationalities in the period of the general national movement for freedom.

## Two Stages

5. The second point of departure of our resolution is, therefore, the building up of the unity of all sections of the people to win the freedom of our country and to maintain that freedom on the basis of the unity and equality of all nationalities and minorities in Ceylon. **UNITY OF THE PEOPLE CANNOT BE REALISED WITHIN ANY OTHER FRAMEWORK AND THIS UNITY EXCLUDES SUCH INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS WHICH STAND FOR THE CONTINUED SUBJECT STATUS OF OUR COUNTRY.** Any attempt at building unity with those who do not stand for freedom of Ceylon is doomed to failure.

6. Our resolution, therefore, envisages two stages : (a) creating the basis for building unity for the common national demand for recognition of independence and a free constitution, and (b) carrying forward this unity when we have won our freedom and the right to determine our own form of life.

## First Stage – Recognition of Principles

7. In the first stage, we consider that what is essential is a *recognition of principles* which would eliminate the fear of the non-Sinhalese peoples that freedom of Ceylon will mean their domination by the Sinhalese people, ensure them of their right to free development and thus bring them into the common united national front.

8. We therefore consider that Congress should give a lead which will eliminate the fears of the minority nationalities. It should declare its allegiance to the principle of the equality of the nationalities in a free Ceylon, including the guarantee of the rights of the minorities. It should declare that freedom for Ceylon will mean freedom for all sections of the people of Ceylon,

9. We consider that the essential principles to form the substance of such a declaration should be those set out in the second resolution attached. In this connection, we would like to deal with three points: (a) the rights of nationalities; (b) the problem of Indians in Ceylon; (c) the interspersed minorities.

10. When we say that a nationality has the right to independent political existence, we do not consider that this right is an obligation. Our recognition of the Sinhalese and Tamils, for instance, as separate nationalities does not oblige them to form independent states. On the contrary, the very development of Ceylon politically economically and culturally makes it possible and even desirable for these nationalities to exist in a united Ceylon. The recognition of their right to independent political existence is necessary as it shows that there is no qualification of their right to self-determination and removes the fear that one nationality wishes to dominate another.

11. The Indians in Ceylon occupy a special position, similar to the Indians in South Africa or pre-Jap Malaya. They have come and been brought to Ceylon since 1827 and live in the main in the traditional homelands of the Sinhalese people, as a large interspersed minority. The problem is whether all these Indians have to be repatriated or whether all or a section of them have to be absorbed in the country. The first possibility is obviously undesirable and would be a crime against a section of people who have made and can in the future make an important and substantial contribution to Ceylon's development. It is worth noting that the Indians comprise nearly one-sixth of the total population of Ceylon and that, of these, the number permanently settled in the country (estimates vary between 40% and 70%) are almost as large as the Ceylon Tamils and larger than the Ceylon Moors.

12. In view of this, it is only fair that those Indians, now in Ceylon, who are prepared to adopt this country as their permanent home should have the same rights and privileges as any other community. Ceylon, of course, will retain its right to control any further immigration into the island, according to its national interests.

13. Point (c) in the second printed resolution contains the declaration of principles we consider necessary for the interspersed minorities.

14. We contend that acceptance and declaration by Congress of the principles enumerated above and in the resolution under reference are necessary and sufficient to provide the basis for building up a united national front of the people of Ceylon behind the national demand.

#### Second Stage – Carrying Forward Unity

15. Acceptance of the aforesaid principles, building up of the united national front and the struggle for the freedom of Ceylon will lay the material and psychological basis for carrying forward the unity of the various nationalities and minorities in the period after we have won freedom,

16. When we have attained freedom, the question remains as to what type of constitution and representation we must have in order to put the aforesaid principles into practice. We consider that this is feasible by the creation of two equal chambers, both elected on universal adult franchise. One should be a Chamber of Representatives, elected according to territorial electorates ensuring the principle of the equality of the citizens of a free Ceylon; and the other a Chamber of Nationalities, ensuring the principle of the equality of the nationalities of a free and united Ceylon.

17. With regard to the Chamber of Representatives, the underlying principles should be (a) one representative for so many citizens, and (b) electoral boundaries should avoid cutting across national groupings. This form of representation will ensure a majority of representatives from electoral areas in traditional Sinhalese homelands. We suggest that it would be worthwhile considering the question of creating certain joint electorates in order to give due representation to large interspersed minorities, if it is not considered possible to carry out the suggestion in paragraph 22 regarding Indians and Ceylon Moors.

18. Regarding the Chamber of Nationalities, the only available figures of the distribution of population according to nationality are those of the 1921 census. These however are based on the present provincial delimitation which is not based on any principle apart from an attempt to divide nationalities into fragments. Nevertheless, a glance at the distribution of population given below clearly shows that, while the Singhalese people constitute 67% of the total population of the island, there are certain areas where definite nationalities predominate and also mixed areas where no nationality predominates. (Figures are from the 1921 census and percentages approximate.) S=Singhalese; IND=Indians; CT=Ceylon Tamils; CM=Ceylon Moors.

Province	S	CT	IND	CM
Western	82	2	9	4
Southern	94	–	3	2
North-Western	85	3	6	6
North-Central	76	6	5	11
Sabaragamuwa	74	–	21	3
Northern	1	94	1	3
Eastern	5	53	1	39
Central	52	1	40	6
Uva	60	1	36	2

19. Allowing for the fact that changes have undoubtedly taken place between 1921 and the present day, which cannot be established due to the lack of more up-to-date statistics; we see from the above table that (a) the Singhalese people form a predominant majority in 5 provinces (W, S, NW, NC, SAB), (b) the Singhalese people form an absolute majority in the Central and Uva Provinces, with Indians as a substantial minority; (c) the Tamils form a predominant majority in the Northern Province; (d) Tamils form an absolute majority in the Eastern Province, with Ceylon Moors as a strong minority; (e) in none of the existing provinces do Indians or Ceylon Moors form an absolute majority.

20. While it is easy to delimit anew areas where the Singhalese and Tamil people predominate, it is not so easy to delimit areas where the Indians or the Moors predominate, as the following tables show: –

#### I. – Singhalese-Indian Mixed Areas

<i>District</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>Ind.</i>
Kandy	55	36
Matale	61	30
Nuwara Eliya	35	60

Badulla	58	35
Ratnapura	74	22
Kegalle	73	20

## II – Tamil-Sinhalese-Moors Mixed Area

<i>District</i>	<i>CT</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>CM</i>
Puttalam	15	42	32

## III. – Tamil-Moor Mixed Areas

District	Tamils	Moors
Mannar	58	30
Trincomalee	52	39
Batticaloa	53	37

We thus see that the Moors do not form even an absolute majority in any area, while the Indians have an absolute majority only in the Nuwara Eliya district, an area approximately 900 sq. miles with a population of 167,612 in 1921. The Moors speak Tamil and are an important interspersed minority in the areas where the Ceylon Tamils have an absolute majority; while the Indians, though speaking Tamil, are cut off from the rest of the Tamil-speaking people and form a large interspersed minority in Sinhalese homelands.

21. In determining representation to the Chamber of Nationalities, it is possible, depending on the circumstances then existing, to adopt one of the following two courses: (a) delimiting Ceylon into two national regions, namely, Sinhalese and Tamil wherein the Moors and the Indians will form large interspersed minorities. Each of these national regions should have the same number of representatives in the Chamber of Nationalities. In this case, we recommend for consideration that [sic] the principle of joint electorates to give due representation to large interspersed minorities in the Chamber of Representatives. At the same time we suggest that consistent efforts be made to develop the Moors and the Indians as distinct nationalities by giving them lands to ensure their national development; (b) delimiting Ceylon into four national regions – Sinhalese, Tamils, Indians and Moors. To make this feasible, the Indians and Moors should, we suggest, be given lands to develop as distinct nationalities. The question of developing Indians as a nationality in a national region will, of course, depend on the number of Indians who wish to, and will be allowed to, settle down permanently in Ceylon. In the Chamber of Nationalities, each region should have equal representation.

22. If 21(b) is adopted, there is no need for joint electorates for the Chamber of Representatives.

23. In conclusion, as we have still to build a united national front for our freedom, we again stress the importance of paragraphs 7-14. What is wanted today is the recognition, declaration and agreement on principles which will unite all sections of the population for the common struggle. The detailed drafting of a constitution ought to be left to a constitution-making body appointed by a Constituent Assembly after freedom has been won.

From: <http://www.tamilnation.org/selfdetermination/tamileelam/4410communistresolution.htm>