

THE CEYLON CYCLONE APPEAL COMMITTEE

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(Anglo-Asian Conservative Association), Iain McDonald (Church of Scotland), Martin Walker (Secretary).

We are writing to you as an organisation in the Labour Movement to ask your support in our efforts to help fellow workers in Ceylon.

Last November, the island of Ceylon was hit by the most devastating cyclone to come out of the Indian Ocean in a generation. Beginning with 120mph winds which lashed the island, uprooted the palm trees and tore down the houses, the cyclone climaxed in a tidal wave which swept inland, drowning hundreds of people, flooding the rice paddies with poisonous salt water, and washing away the roads, bridge and communications on which any relief effort depended.

More than 100,000 people became homeless. Over a thousand died. Many are reported 'missing' washed out to sea. The economy of the eastern half of the island has been ruined for a decade. The dead can be buried, the survivors can be fed, temporary shelter can be built. But unless those palm plantations can be replanted, and rice paddies drained and restored, then more than a million people could fall below that narrow line which separates Third World poverty from real starvation.

The saddest twist to the disaster was that many of its victims are among the very poorest and most miserable citizens of the British Commonwealth – the Tamils of the tea plantations. Imported from India by the British Empire in the 19th century to work on the tea plantations, the plight of these workers has already touched the conscience of the British people. Press and TV reports have shown people in Britain the real price of their cups of tea – in the infant mortality, the lack of education and medical care, in the plantation 'lines' where they live. British employers did little for the plantation workers, and the cyclone and the ruin it bred has put a heavier, sadder burden upon them. It is to help them, and the other non-Tamil victims of the cyclone on the island, that this appeal to the generosity and sympathy of the British people has been launched.

We are counting heavily on the support of the British Labour Movement in this appeal, and we ask you to give generously, and to circulate the news of our appeal among your friends, your groups and organisations. Our appeal is supported by Christian Aid, who have agreed to act as the collection agency for all funds that we raise, and also to be responsible for their allocation on the island. Christian Aid's reputation in emergency relief work is second to none, and we are honoured that they are working with us to try and restore the livelihood of so many devastated people.

Cheques should be marked payable to "Ceylon Cyclone Appeal" and sent direct to:
Christian Aid, P.O. Box 1, LONDON SW9 8BH