SRI LANKA'S TEA PLANTATION WORKERS SAY NO TO TAMIL SEPARATISTS !

The Tamil United Liberation Front's demand for a separate Tamil state within Sri Lanka has been totally rejected by one of its own political allies! This became evident from Mr. S. Thondaman's bold decision to join the Cabinet of President J.R. Jayawardhane.

- Mr. Thondaman is the leader of the plantation sector's strongest and biggest trade union - the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC).
- He was a co-President of the Tamil United Liberation Front whose main pledge at the last general election was to create a separate Tamil state.

It is indeed significant that Mr. Thondaman has now disowned the Tamil extremists and rejected the whole idea of a separate state. On 3 September 1978, he gave a candid interview to the Sunday Observer. The Observer's reporter, Rohan Peiris, asked Mr. Thondaman :

' What is your attitude and that of the CWC to the demand for Eelam ?'

The CWC's leader replied -

' The Vadukoddai resolution recognised our reservation with regard to this demand since it affords no solutions to the problems confronting our people living in the up-country...'

Mr. Thondaman further said -

' Look at the problem this way. Our people were given the opportunity to leave for India. In fact, the Indian government gave special incentives, yet they chose to live in Sri Lanka - the land of their birth. We as leaders know the hopes and aspirations of our people, and to them a separate state is no solution to their problems or to what they hope to achieve...'

The conclusions to be drawn from this situation are obvious :

a. The TULF's demand for a separate state has no universal approval or recognition. Even those who voted for them (as we shall soon prove) did not support this demand for 'separatism.'

b. The TULF supporters, particularly those in the UK, have pretended to be the spokesmen for the Indian plantation workers merely as a cheap means of winning the sympathy of the British officialdom (especially the Home Office!), the public and the media.

c. The cast-conscious Tamils in the North have not shown any concern for the Indian worker whom they treat as one belonging to a lower social order.

d. The Indian workers and their leadership, in spite of their recent ties with the TULF, have fully realised that the demand for a separate Tamil state is unacceptable and senseless.

.....contd/

The "Mandate" for "Eelam"

(With grateful acknowledgements to the ECONOMIC REVIEW published by the People's Bank, Colombo, we are pleased to reproduce below extracts from a research article that appeared in the journal's issue of July 1977).

At the 1977 General elections in the Northern province the TULF polled 69% of the votes whilst in the Eastern province they polled 32.9% of the votes. Of this percentage the largest share was in the two poles of Jaffna district and Batticaloa district receiving respectively 72.2% and 31.2%. In the Northern province 31% voted against the TULF whilst in the Eastern province 67.1% voted against the TULF. Clearly, in the Eastern province there was no mandate for the TULF; in fact there was over a two-third majority against the TULF in this province.

But a mandate for a Tamil separate state is not claimed by the TULF as to be arising from only the Northern province where 52.4% of the Ceylon Tamils live, (and where only 28.5% of the total Tamil population including the Indian Tamils live) but also from the entire Tamil population in Sri Lanka. What percentage of the Tamil population in fact voted for the TULF? Of the Tamil population the entire Ceylon Tamil population has the franchise while only a portion of the Indian Tamil population has it. Polls results therefore do not adequately reflect the views of the total Tamil population. But if we make the reasonable assumption that the Indian Tamil who did not have the vote would have behaved electorally as those with the vote, then we can make a fair judgement on the total commitment of the Tamil population to the "Eelam" cause (assuming of course that all those who voted for the TULF voted for "Eelam").

Mandate for Eelam from 24 Percent of All Tamils

In the country as a whole there were 2,610,935 Tamils at the time of the 1971 Census, both of Ceylon and Indian origin. Of this total only about 40% could have voted for the TULF in areas where their candidates contested. Further statistical analysis shows, that only two-thirds of the 28.5% Tamil population in the Northern province and only one-third of the 11.7% Tamil population in the Eastern province may have voted for Eelam. Together this amounts to less than 25% of the total Tamil population of the country. If we take only two areas where geographically there is a preponderence of Tamils and where a majority voted for the Tamils, these votes for Eelam in these two provinces are estimated to constitute less than 25% of the total Tamil population of the country.

In the Central province where the Indian origin Tamils preponderate there were no TULF candidates although there were non-TULF Tamil candidates. Thus if we make the assumption referred to earlier of equating the voter behaviour of the Indian Tamils without the vote to those with it, then the mandate of the total Tamil population both Indian and Ceylon is of course small.

Provincial Patterns

Taking another look at provincial voting patterns—from the point of view of the two main contending parties at the 1977 general elections, namely the UNP and the SLFP—a significant trend observed is that both these parties had increased their percentage of total votes received in the Northern as well as Eastern provinces. In 1977 in the Northern province the UNP received 6.79% of the votes polled against 3.18% in 1970—a gain of 4.51%; while the SLFP received 1.37% of the total votes polled in 1977 as against 0.37% of the votes polled in 1970—a gain of 1%. In the Eastern province the UNP received 37.99% of the total votes polled in 1977 as against 31.65% in 1970—a gain of 6.3%; while the SLFP received 26.76% of the total votes polled in 1977 as against 23.16% in 1970—a gain of 3.60%.

On the other hand the FP and TC together received 82.4% of the total votes cast in the Northern province in 1970. In 1977 together they received 69%. In the Eastern province, however, together these two parties received 25.1% in 1970 and 32.9% in 1977. It is significant that in 1970 the TC put up no contestants in the Eastern province. The shifts in the combined votes of the TC and FP or TULF, since the July 1960 General election is evident from figures in the following table.

Proportion of votes received by the combined FP and TC of all votes cast in the Northern and Eastern Provinces

	Northern Province	*Eastern Province*
1960	80.56	41.56
1965	79.93	35.44
1970	82.32	25.09
1977	68.98	32.92

The percentage drop of the combined FP and TC of the total votes cast at the general election since July 1960 was .7% in 1965; .6% in 1970; and .5% in 1977 (See table below).

Percentage of all votes cast of total electorate for combined FP and TC or TULF

Year	*% of Votes*	*% Change*
1960 July	8.3	
1965	7.8	—.5
1970	7.2	—.6
1977	6.5	—.7

Together the two parties gained their highest combined share of the total electorate in July 1960. At that General election together they collected 8.3% of the total number of votes cast. At the next election in 1965 together they received 7.8% of the total votes. In 1970 they received 7.2% of the total votes and in 1977 they received 6.5% of the total votes. It is evident that with each succeeding general election the percentage of votes they received from the total electorate has continued to fall reaching its lowest point in 1977.

The total number of votes received in 1977 by the TULF was 397,498 or 6.5% of the total votes cast at this general election. These votes were concentrated in the Northern province 70% and Eastern province 29%; while North Western province had .8%. In the Northern province there were 31% of the voters who voted against the TULF; while in the Eastern province 67.1% of the total votes went against the TULF. Against the TULF 32.9% of the total votes in the Eastern province, the UNP received 38%, the SLFP 26.8%, the LSSP 0.4% and Independents 1.9%.

In the Northern province, on the other hand, as many as 21.1% cast their votes for independents. The significance of this high vote for independent candidates is that a large percentage of the Tamil voters in the North had no alternative party to the TULF for whom they could vote.

Negative Response

It is seen that instead of their joint votes going up with the cry of Eelam the combined percentage vote had dropped. The level of participation of the 1977 general election was higher than ever before with 86.7% casting their vote in the country as a whole and the percentage vote in the Northern and Eastern provinces also reaching new peaks. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the drop in the percentage of the vote signifies a negative response to the TULF by the Tamil population.

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