

Letter from Philip John Noel-Baker on the Ceylon independence celebrations (London, 3 March 1948)

Caption: In a letter dated 3 March 1948, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Philip John Noel-Baker, describes the festivities held to mark the independence of Ceylon on 10 February 1948.

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Last updated: 01/03/2017

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CEYLON (H.C.)

Commonwealth Relations Office,

NO. 8

Downing Street.

3 March, 1948.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your despatch No.2 of the 5th February and to inform you that its contents have been read with interest. You may wish to have for your records the following account of the celebrations held in this country upon the coming into operation of the Ceylon Independence Act.

2. Owing to the absence from London of Mr. Corea, the Ceylon Government Representative, activities on 4th February were confined to personal contact between members of the Commonwealth Relations Office and officials of the staff of the Ceylon Government Representative in London.

3. On the morning of the 10th February a simple ceremony took place at Ceylon House, where Mr. Corea broke the Lion Flag from the staff above the building before an assembly

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THE HIGH COMMISSIONER IN CEYLON
FOR HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT IN THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND.

which included members of the Ceylonese community in London. Sir E. Machtig and other officials of the Commonwealth Relations Office were present.

4. In the evening a crowded and gay reception was held by Mr. and Mrs. Corea in the Savoy Hotel. More than 500 guests included distinguished representatives of Commonwealth and other countries. The brilliant saris worn by the Ceylonese ladies present lent additional and colourful gaiety to a room already bright with flags and flowers.

5. In a short introductory speech Mr. Corea welcomed his guests and expressed pride and satisfaction at the way in which Ceylon had achieved her independence through steady progress in friendly co-operation with the United Kingdom. The gathering then heard speeches from the Prime Minister followed by the Rt. Hon. the Lord Addison representing the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, the Rt. Hon. J. A. Beasley, Australian High Commissioner in the United Kingdom, Mr. H. I. Rahistoola, Pakistan High Commissioner in the United Kingdom, and Mr. D. R. Rees-Williams, M.P. Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, representing the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Mr. Attlee stated, in heralding Ceylon's entry as an equal partner in the British Commonwealth "I have always been struck by the practical statesmanship of the leaders in Ceylon" and went on to assert "it is not always easy to work gradually by stages toward a goal that is so much desired but in Ceylon the people have steadily

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advanced toward the achievement we are celebrating to-day. We wish the people of Ceylon every success - politically, economically and socially. We now see there the full working of parliamentary democracy and the success of parliamentary democracy depends above all things upon a spirit of tolerance. That I believe has been shown in Ceylon, and will be shown in the future." Lord Addison recalled his visit to Ceylon on the occasion of the opening in October last of the first Parliament of Ceylon elected under the "Soulbury" Constitution and reminiscently dwelt on the charm of her people and the beauty of the island. He added that the Ceylon High Commissioner in London would be warmly welcomed by his fellow High Commissioners, and would be able to enjoy, with them, the benefits of cordial and frank discussion. This was confirmed by Mr. Beasley, who in welcoming Ceylon to the Commonwealth referred especially to the common interests of his own country and "that wonderful and beautiful little island." Mr. Rahimtoola, expressing his "heartiest felicitations on this proud and glorious day," congratulated the leaders of Ceylon and of the United Kingdom on bringing about the "smooth transition from Colonial to fully independent and sovereign rights within the British Commonwealth of Nations." He concluded "We in Pakistan are particularly happy to see the birth of a free nation, and we wish to assure the peoples of Ceylon of our fullest co-operation in promoting friendship and mutual understanding between us, the foundations of which have already been laid by the recent visit to Pakistan of the Prime Minister of Ceylon. We also assure them of our fullest goodwill."

Mr. Rees-Williams recalled the long and
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honourable history of Ceylon and the great cultural and technical achievements of her ancient civilisation. He emphasised the steady progress in mutual trust between British and Ceylonese in the past 150 years, and spoke of the many warm personal friendships which had grown. He looked forward to the continuance of these happy relations with members of the Colonial Office, even though the excuse of business no longer brought them together.

6. In a concluding speech Mr. Corea explained that the United Kingdom Government were handing back the sovereignty which the people of Ceylon had given over in trust by the Treaty of 1815, and commented, at some length on the fidelity with which the United Kingdom had fulfilled its obligations. After paying a tribute to the assistance which his country had received from the Colonial Office, Mr. Corea expressed his confidence that the friendship and mutual respect which had marked the relations between Ceylon and the United Kingdom in the past would increase with the passage of time as Ceylon developed her own genius and resources in her own way, for the benefit of her own people and the peoples of the world.

7. The full texts of all the speeches delivered are understood to have been telegraphed to the Press in Ceylon.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient,
humble servant,

(Sd.) P. J. NOEL-BAKER