

Donoughmore Constitution (1931)

The 1931 constitutional settlement that introduced universal adult franchise to Ceylon — and locked in a unitary State Council whose majoritarian arithmetic foreclosed Tamil federal proposals from the outset.

Donoughmore is the structural ancestor. By abolishing communal representation in favour of territorial seats inside a unitary State Council, the 1931 settlement created the demographic geometry that every subsequent Tamil resolution attempt has had to negotiate around — first via the 50-50 proposal, then federalism, then Vaddukoddai.

§1 What it did

The Donoughmore Commission (1928) recommended, and the British implemented in 1931, the abolition of the Legislative Council's communal seat structure in favour of a State Council elected on universal adult franchise from territorial constituencies. Personal laws — Thesawalamai, Kandyan, Muslim — were preserved.

The unitary frame meant the numerically larger community would, in any normal election, hold the working majority. Tamil political leadership accepted the franchise expansion but began arguing immediately — through G.G. Ponnambalam's 50-50 proposal and later through S.J.V. Chelvanayakam's federalism — for constitutional safeguards against permanent minoritisation.

§2 Why it sits in /case

Every Tamil-side resolution attempt catalogued in this archive — Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam 1957, Dudley–Chelvanayakam 1965, Vaddukoddai 1976, Thimpu 1985, Indo-Lanka 1987, Norway 2002–03 — responds to the structural arithmetic that Donoughmore set in 1931 and that the 1972 and 1978 constitutions then hardened.

Sources

- Donoughmore Commission Report (1928), HMSO Cmd. 3131.
- Hoole — historical analysis of Donoughmore.

What this is not

- This article does not argue British colonial administration was benign.
- This article does not adjudicate the 50-50 proposal's merits.