

Britain: Tamils demonstrate outside parliament

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Around 5,000 Tamils demonstrated outside the UK Parliament on a bitterly cold evening Tuesday, the 61st anniversary of the independence of Ceylon, against the war being waged by the government in Sri Lanka and the humanitarian disaster it has produced.

Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) distributed copies of two statements, the recent "A socialist perspective to end the war in Sri Lanka—Troops out of north and eastern Sri Lanka!" and "Sri Lankan independence: 60 years of communalism, social decay and war," both published on February 4.

The leaflets explain that the decades-long racist war is the outcome of the anti-Tamil campaign of the reactionary state created after independence. From the outset, the Sri Lankan ruling elite has sought to maintain its rule by using communalist politics to divide the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese working class.

The statements further argue that while the recent mass protests express genuine popular anger, their leaders limit them to pressuring the Western powers and India to intervene and stop the conflict in Sri Lanka. Such a perspective, perpetuated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), promotes illusions in the very imperialist forces responsible for the war and that give military and diplomatic support to the Sri Lankan government.

The SEP and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League, founded in 1968, have opposed all forms of nationalism and communalism, including the LTTE's Tamil separatism, and fought in difficult circumstances to unite Sinhala and Tamil workers against the war, the widespread abuse of democratic rights and attacks on living standards.

The SEP's program of a Socialist Republic of Sri

Lanka and Eelam, as part of a Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia, offers the only viable road forward for the working class in Sri Lanka and throughout the subcontinent, where ethnic and communal conflicts have created disaster after disaster for working people.

Demonstrators flocked to take the leaflets, and several who had read the leaflet at the 100,000-strong January 31 march offered to help distribute them. A number of people asked for further discussions on the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party. Others gave interviews to our reporters.

Towards the end of the demonstration, Tamil supporters of the SEP were jostled by LTTE stewards and told to stop handing out leaflets. When a British SEP member intervened to ask what was happening, a dozen or so stewards surrounded the SEP campaigners and grabbed their leaflets. One older man took out his mobile phone and said he was finding out what to do. The SEP members then accompanied the stewards to the organisers' desk, where three or four people stood.

One of the organisers said that the SEP leaflet was splitting the Tamil community and 90 percent of Tamils supported the Tamil Tigers and a separate state.

The SEP members protested their treatment. As this dispute took place, around twenty demonstrators gathered around listening. They were told to move on and not to listen to what the SEP was saying. But several indicated their agreement and one said that the leaflet was "a fine statement." One of the stewards in a yellow jacket even took two copies himself.

However, when one Tamil supporter of the SEP was pushed and shoved by the LTTE supporters and asked where he was from, the team decided that it was best to leave. The SEP protests this harassment and demands an end to it.

The SEP team interviewed several Tamil protesters. Sri said, "This is not a war, but more like ethnic cleansing. In the name of targeting the LTTE, they are killing the Tamil people. The Sri Lankan army said move to the 'safe zone,' then bombarded people. There is no democracy anywhere in Sri Lanka. They are killing innocent people."

When asked about the 61st anniversary of Sri Lankan independence, Sri said, "There is this word, independence, but none of the people are enjoying it, even the majority [Sinhala] people. They joined the army for wages. They have been used."

"The Sri Lankan government relies on its army more and more. The police use AK-47 rifles, even inside the villages. They are threatening everyone. The lives of the whole Sri Lankan people—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—have been destroyed by this war."

Another demonstrator, Kamal, explained that Tamils and Sinhalese fought together for independence, but then after independence Sinhala was implemented as a state language. "Little by little, they built Sinhala chauvinism," he said. "They completely suppressed Tamil rights and that led to the armed struggle."

"First, we should stop the war, then we will think about a solution. No one is asking why the government is bombarding safe zones and hospitals. After 61 years our people are still being killed and treated worse than dogs."



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