A socialist perspective to end the war in Sri Lanka

Troops out of north and eastern Sri Lanka!

World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board
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The following statement is being distributed by supporters of the World Socialist Web Site and the International Committee of the Fourth International at international demonstrations called to protest the attack by the Sri Lankan military against Tamil regions in the East and North of Sri Lanka. It is available as a PDF to download and distribute.

Even as the Sri Lankan ruling class celebrates the 61st anniversary of the independence of Ceylon, its armed forces are engaged in the brutal slaughter of innocent Tamil civilians in the northern province of Mullaithivu. This decades-long racist war is the culmination of the anti-Tamil campaign of the reactionary state installed after independence. From the very birth of Sri Lanka, the bourgeoisie has sought to maintain its rule by using anti-Tamil politics to divide the working class, Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese.

The war crimes being committed by the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse are an expression of the increasing turn to brutal methods by the imperialist powers and their national bourgeois surrogates in order to secure their geopolitical interests, as is seen in Afghanistan, Iraq and Gaza. Driven by inter-imperialist rivalries and exacerbated by the worst world economic crisis since the 1930s, the growth of militarism is accompanied by the ruthless destruction of rights and living conditions in the major capitalist countries. This brought two-and-a-half million workers and youth out on strike and onto the streets in France on January 29 as part of a growing movement throughout Europe against unemployment and austerity policies.

Hundreds of thousands have already taken part in demonstrations in Toronto, Paris, London and Berlin against the humanitarian disaster in Sri Lanka. The protests express genuine anger against the racist war, but are limited to demanding that the Western powers and India intervene to stop it. Such a perspective promotes illusions in the very forces that are responsible for the war and which give military and diplomatic support to the Sri Lankan government.

The pro-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam web site "Puthinam" published an article on February 1 titled, "India, India and everything is India." It highlights the dominant Indian political and military role in Sri Lanka and South Asia and recommends that the protests should take place only in front of the Indian embassies in the Western capitals. It argues pathetically, "Our demonstrations in front of the White House, Downing Street, streets of Ottawa and the streets of other Western capitals would only create inconvenience to the respective governments," and urges, "Though they couldn't do anything now, we need the support of the Western states later so we should not trouble them…"

This is to throw dust in the eyes of those taking part in the anti-war protests. The Colombo government was only able to restart and continue its criminal war because it had the backing not only of India, but of the United States, Canada, Britain and France as well.

After its election in November 2005, Rajapakse's government proceeded to systematically derail the ceasefire agreement of 2002. The US and India gave

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military assistance to the Sri Lankan government to launch the war and Canada and the European Union banned the LTTE in May and June 2006 respectively.

The EU justified the ban as part of the efforts to bring the LTTE to the negotiating table for a political settlement. We commented at the time, "Far from bringing peace, the ban only intensifies the danger of a complete breakdown of the current 2002 ceasefire agreement." One month later, the Sri Lankan army launched its first offensive into LTTE territory.

Working people internationally have shown mass opposition to their governments' support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and horror at the war crimes in Gaza. They will feel the same way if made aware of the situation in Sri Lanka. Tamil workers must link their struggles with that of workers all over the world against the common imperialist enemy.

Following the bans in Canada and Europe, LTTE offices were raided and leading members were arrested. LTTE front organisations, cultural centres and shops have been placed under the permanent surveillance of the police.

Justifying the moves against the LTTE as the "prevention of terrorism," the EU countries have been deporting asylum-seeking Tamils on a regular basis. On January 15, the British Labour government deported on a charter flight to Colombo the first batch of what they described as "illegally overstaying" Sri Lankan nationals. In fact, as media reports revealed, the majority of the deportees were minority Tamils seeking refuge and asylum from the civil war.

Despite these vicious anti-democratic crackdowns, the LTTE continues to appeal to these same powers for support. Its demand for a capitalist statelet in the North and East of Sri Lanka to fulfil the needs of sections of the Tamil elite was always based on the mediation of one or other of the major powers.

The LTTE's attempts to woo the imperialist powers go hand in hand with its blaming of the Sinhalese toilers for the war. In reality they are its victims. The war has been invoked by the Sinhala elite to justify a never-ending campaign to drive down living standards and attack workers' and democratic rights.

The allies of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka and in the diaspora in the imperialist countries are the working class. It is the only social force with the power and whose class interests lie in ending the war, overthrowing the Sri Lankan bourgeois state, and ensuring the democratic rights of the Tamil population, as part of the struggle against the imperialist world order.

The January 29 mass demonstrations and protests in France against unemployment and social cuts are the prelude to struggles throughout Europe. The Tamil and immigrant working class and youth in France and Europe are an integral part of these struggles. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its youth wing, the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE), call upon them participate in the building of a new political leadership in the working class on the basis of a revolutionary socialist programme that places the economy under the democratic control of the working class.

In Sri Lanka, the ICFI's section, the Socialist Equality Party, is the only party fighting for the unification of working people regardless of their ethnic origin and demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of armed forces from the North and East. The SEP advances the struggle for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia, the only means for putting an end to the communal, ethnic and caste politics that have plagued the whole region for over half a century.

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