

# The Sri Lankan election, the LTTE and Tamil nationalism

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27 January 2010

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or LTTE has splintered into many rival factions since its military defeat last spring. Whatever their differences, all the factions pursue essentially the same bankrupt nationalist course, seeking to woo great-power support for establishing a separate capitalist state on the north and east of the island and manoeuvring with Sri Lanka's bourgeois Sinhalese elite.

All are bitterly opposed to the struggle to secure the democratic rights of the Tamil masses through the mobilization of the working class and oppressed toilers of Sri Lanka against the reactionary Sri Lankan state and in the fight for the establishment of the Socialist United States of Lanka and Eelam.

During the civil war this found graphic expression in the LTTE's indiscriminate violence against Sinhalese working people and the repression they directed against the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in areas under LTTE control, although the SEP was the only political force that fought to mobilise the working class to end the communal war by forcing the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Sri Lankan security forces from the north and east.

In the just concluded presidential election, much of the LTTE exile movement and the Tamil National Alliance, a bourgeois electoral front that acted as a mouthpiece for the LTTE during the latter stages of the 26-year-long civil war, supported the main opposition candidate General Sarath Fonseka over the incumbent Mahinda Rajapakse on the grounds that he is the "lesser evil."

Fonseka and Rajapakse are in fact partners in crime, responsible for the ravaging of the Tamil-majority north and east and the deaths of thousands of civilians and LTTE fighters. Rajapakse, who came to power in November 2005, and Fonseka, who served as the commander of the Sri Lankan army from December 2005 till mid-July 2009, jointly led the Sinhala bourgeoisie's military drive to reassert control over the island. In the middle of 2006, they relaunched the war, ordering repeated bloody offensives that ultimately culminated in the military overrunning the LTTE's territories while causing untold loss of civilian life and property damage, the extermination of the LTTE leadership, and the illegal confinement of more than 280,000 Tamils in squalid detention

camps.

Beginning in December, just seven months after the end of the communal war, pro-LTTE websites such as *Tamilwin*, *Infotamil*, and *Puthinappalakai* began urging the Tamil masses to vote for General Fonseka. Then in January a dominant faction of the Tamil National Alliance came to an agreement with Fonseka to support the general's presidential bid.

"We request that in the presidential election the Tamil people should cast their invaluable votes for Fonseka," declared an article published on the *Tamilwin* website January 13.

It continued: "We have directly seen and experienced the truth that President Mahinda is a politician without any moral scruples. Instead of giving Mahinda, who is an embodiment of linguistic and religious fanaticism, a lover of power and genocide, an opportunity to become the president again, he must be treated as an enemy. If you choose to conduct your liberation movement under him, even among the irrational animals, irrational beings like you cannot be found. You cannot but fail to note that after all Fonseka was but an arrow aimed at the Tamils by Mahinda. What is the use of blaming the arrow, sparing the one who unleashed it? Catch hold of the weapon of the enemy and attack him with that."

The claim that Fonseka was a mere "arrow" or tool of Rajapakse is patently absurd. He is an arch-communist—he told a Canadian newspaper in 2008 that Sri Lanka "belongs to the Sinhalese"—who rose to be head of the military by his ruthless prosecution of the anti-Tamil war. For his conduct of the occupation of the north and east, Fonseka received eight "special" awards from the Sri Lankan state and military.

Moreover, Fonseka's presidential bid has been promoted by the big business United National Party (UNP), the party that launched the war in 1983, and powerful sections of Colombo's business community because they want a "strongman," reputedly above the political fray, at the helm under conditions where the next government—whoever leads it—will be tasked with imposing IMF-dictated austerity measures.

Rajapakse has himself spoken of a coming "economic war," a euphemism for massive social spending cuts and an all-out assault on the working class.

Fonseka's presidential bid was also supported by the ultra-chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramauna (JVP), which has long

served the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie by dividing the working class along communal lines. It was aligned with Rajapakse as he relaunched and prosecuted the communal war and has been among the most strident opponents of any devolution of power away from the Colombo-based Sinhala elite.

A significant factor in the support pivotal sections of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie have given Fonseka is their concern that Rajapakse has drawn too close to China and too far away from their traditional allies, the US, the European Union and India.

The LTTE, it must be noted, responded to the devastating reversals it suffered starting in late 2008, by intensifying its longstanding efforts to win the favor of the major western imperialist powers. It organized numerous marches in which diaspora Tamils, anxious for the fate of their families, were instructed to carry portraits of US President Barack Obama, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel on the grounds that these imperialist leaders could be pressured into coming to the aid of the Tamil masses.

This proved to be a reactionary trap. But the LTTE leadership continues to hold out hope that with the aid of the western powers—who have strategic concerns about China’s growing influence in Sri Lanka—they might be able to come to some type of accommodation with the Sinhalese bourgeoisie at the expense of the masses, Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim.

No faction of the disintegrating LTTE exile organization criticized the support given Fonseka by *Tamilwin* and other pro-LTTE websites and by the Tamil National Alliance or at least large sections of it. This clearly demonstrates that none is in fundamental disagreement with encouraging the Tamil masses to place their hopes in Fonseka and his promoters and sponsors within the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie.

V. Ruthirakumaran, who lives in the US and has developed close ties with the Washington establishment, leads one faction of LTTE. In his New Year message, Ruthirakumaran said nothing about the elections, but made it clear that he is bidding for the support of US imperialism by saying that the Transitional Government of Tamil Eelam he is promoting will “bear in mind the changes in the geo-political circumstances in South Asia.”

Other sections of the LTTE in Norway, France, Germany, Canada and Britain have stated that a referendum should be held to ascertain the wishes of the Tamil diaspora, under the guidelines of the 1976 “Vattukottai Conference Resolution.” This resolution first proposed the ethnic partition of Sri Lanka. These sections of the LTTE were silent on the presidential election.

The president of the Tamil National Alliance, R. Sampanthan, and many of its 18 Members of Parliament (MPs) supported Fonseka’s presidential campaign in the hopes of winning favors from an opposition-led government.

But the TNA, a coalition of bourgeois parties founded in 2001, actually split four ways over the presidential election.

A group led by TNA MP Nallathamby Srikantha threw its

support behind Rajapakse. It has been rumoured that Srikantha will soon cross over to the government benches in parliament.

TNA MP Gajendran Ponnambalam led a faction that urged neutrality in the elections and another TNA MP, M.K. Shivajilingham, stood as an independent candidate for president in a vote-preference alliance with the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP). An ostensibly leftist party, the NSSP has a long history of sordid opportunist manoeuvres, at one point simultaneously courting the LTTE and JVP. (See: “Sri Lankan election: the NSSP’s naked electoral cretinism”)

Shivajilingham is a rank communal politician, whose close ties with India’s official opposition, the Hindu supremacist and unabashedly pro-big business Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP.) They are so close that India’s Congress Party accused Shivajilingham of being the BJP’s campaign manager for the southern India state of Tamil Nadu in last year’s general election.

The LTTE’s nationalist and pro-capitalist perspective has led the Tamil masses into a bloody blind alley, separating them from their true allies in the struggle for their democratic rights, the working class in Sri Lanka and internationally.

The presidential elections have only further demonstrated the urgent need for the Tamils to adopt a radically new perspective.

This is the significance of the campaign mounted by the Socialist Equality Party and its presidential candidate Wije Dias.

The SEP’s final election appeal explained, “The LTTE’s military defeat was above all the outcome of the political bankruptcy of its perspective of a separate capitalist Tamil state. Its communal politics, anti-democratic methods and terrorist attacks on civilians helped divide the working class and cut it off from not only the Sinhalese, but also the Tamil masses. There is no separate solution for Tamil workers and youth. The democratic rights of Tamils will only be won as part of a unified struggle of the working class to abolish capitalism...”

“The SEP is the only party that intransigently opposed the 26-year war and demanded the immediate withdrawal of troops from the North and East.

“The SEP continues to demand an immediate end to the military occupation, the release of all political prisoners and the abolition of all repressive laws. Our perspective is not based on parliamentary manoeuvres but the independent mobilisation of the working class and rural masses in a common struggle for a workers’ and farmers’ government to restructure society on socialist lines. That is the meaning of our call for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the broader struggle for socialism throughout South Asia and internationally.”



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