

Pro-imperialist Global Tamil Forum inaugurated at British Parliament

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The Global Tamil Forum (GTF), a new organization that purports to be the “authentic voice” of the Tamil Diaspora—that is, of the hundreds of thousands of Tamils who were forced to flee to Europe, North America, India and elsewhere by the racist war mounted by the Sri Lankan state—held its inaugural meeting at the British Parliament last month.

The GTF’s choice of venue was no happenstance. The February 24th conference had the blessings of the entire British political establishment and of the US government.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown met with representatives of the GTF. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, the Conservative “shadow” foreign secretary William Hague, and his Liberal Democrat counterpart, Ed Davery, addressed the GTF conference. Conservative Party leader David Cameron and Robert Blake, the current US Secretary of State for South and Central Asia and a former US ambassador to Sri Lanka, sent greetings. Reverend Jesse Jackson, who was introduced as “President Obama’s friend,” gave a speech welcoming the GTF’s founding.

The GTF, as its eager pursuit of the favor of US and British imperialism attests, speaks not for the Tamil masses, but for the corrupt and servile Tamil bourgeoisie, which is always ready to impose unlimited sacrifices upon the people in order to further its own venal interests.

The GTF has been formed by émigré organizations previously aligned with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which collapsed last year following the overrunning of its separatist enclave by the Sri Lankan military. These include the British Tamil Forum, La Maison du Tamil Eelam (France), the Canadian Tamil Congress, and the Swiss Tamil Forum.

Like the LTTE, the GTF advances a nationalist program for the creation of an independent capitalist state and is openly courting the favour of the Western powers.

The US, Britain, France, and the other European Union powers provided the Colombo regime with critical military and political support in its war of extermination against the LTTE, a war that climaxed with the Sri Lankan army inflicting horrific casualties on defenceless civilians and herding hundreds of thousands of Tamils into internment camps.

Now, however, these very same powers are cynically

expressing alarm about the human rights violations committed by the Sri Lankan government and military in the war’s final stages and about the democratic rights of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka.

Behind this shift lies Washington’s and London’s predatory geo-political interests—its concern that under President Mahinda Rajapakse Sri Lanka has drifted too far into the orbit of China. They are seeking to use the plight of the Tamils as a bargaining chip, as a means of pressuring Colombo to be more attentive to their interests.

And the GTF is clearly eager to act as their cat’s paw.

Pro-LTTE web sites have hailed the imperialist patronage for the GTF. They have gleefully published photographs of British Prime Minister Brown, Foreign Secretary Miliband and Conservative frontbencher Hague with GTF conference delegates.

“This is a great support to us,” exalted the GTF’s president, the professor and Roman Catholic priest S.J. Emanuel. “The British Government more than any other government in the world, knows our history. This is adequate enough to appreciate our situation.”

With these trite phrases Emanuel seeks to ingratiate himself with the British government and capitalist elite, absolving them of their responsibility for sowing, during a century and a half of colonial rule, enmity between the Tamil and Sinhalese people as part of their “divide and rule” strategy and of their continuing participation in the imperialist exploitation of the island and region.

According to the Sri Lankan government, Britain is the island’s third biggest foreign investor with more than 200 British-based firms having invested some \$429 million.

The elements now regrouping round the GTF previously sought to achieve their reactionary project of a “self-governing nation of Tamil Eelam” by applying pressure on the Sri Lankan government through armed struggle, while appealing for support from India and the imperialist powers. They were, and are, hostile to and utterly incapable of making any appeal to the Sinhalese working class and toilers to come to the defence of the rights of the Tamil people as part of a struggle against the communal, capitalist Sri Lankan state.

Last May Day, when hundreds of thousands of French workers demonstrated against the Sarkozy government's cuts in social expenditure, and the loss of jobs and mounting poverty, the LTTE supporters once again demonstrated where their class sympathies lie. They participated in the demonstrations carrying pictures of Obama, Brown, Sarkozy and Germany's Angela Merkel, along with banners saying "Help us." At the same time they threatened WSWS supporters distributing leaflets calling for an end to the war on the basis of the unity of the Sri Lankan working class on a socialist and internationalist programme.

The failure of the LTTE's perspective has obliged the Tamil bourgeoisie and their nationalist petty bourgeois followers to change tactics. The GTF, according to its founding document, adheres to "democracy and non-violence" and to "the principles of emancipation promoted by Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King" in struggling for a "self-governing nation of Tamil Eelam."

The British and US governments are welcoming this change, deeming it as a pledge that the GTF will work within the existing capitalist structures internationally and in Sri Lanka. Significantly, the Tamil National Alliance, the parliamentary party previously aligned with the LTTE, supported the candidacy of General Fonseka, who as head of the Sri Lankan army directed the war in its final years, in January's presidential election, on the grounds that this war criminal was the lesser evil to Rajapakse. The vast majority of Tamils living in the Tamil-majority north and east rejected this reactionary perspective and refused to vote in the election.

The support lavished on the GTF at its founding by the British political establishment and Obama administration indicates that they view it as a potentially very useful tool in pressuring the Sri Lankan government and Colombo's Sinhalese bourgeois elite to restrict China's influence on the island.

However, neither Brown nor Blake indicated any support for the GTF's call for a separate state. The US and European imperialist powers share India's concern that the creation of a separate state of Eelam could open up a Pandora's Box of separatist demands across an already volatile South Asian region and that this instability could adversely affect their interests.

Speaking at the GTF's inaugural meeting, Miliband said, "I want to commend very, very strongly your decision to, not just to support non-violence, but to advocate non-violence." He then went on to suggest that the "peace process" in Northern Ireland could serve as an example for the Tamils. The British foreign secretary was clearly canvassing for a power-sharing agreement similar to the one Tony Blair constructed for the British enclave. Under this agreement, sectarian divisions have been institutionalised as a means of dividing the working class

and maintaining imperialist rule.

Nervous about the emergence of the GTF, the Sri Lankan government strongly criticized the support extended it by Miliband and Brown. The government convened a press conference to condemn the GTF as an LTTE front and Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama summoned the acting British High Commissioner to administer a "strong protest" against the British foreign minister's participation in the GTF meeting. More than 200 supporters of Rajapakse's Sri Lankan Freedom Party and the racist Nationalist Freedom Front of Vimal Viravansa staged a demonstration in Colombo with pictures portraying Miliband and Brown as devils with tiger stripes.

The GTF serves to perpetuate the reactionary separatist perspective of the LTTE. It also works to divide Tamil workers and youth in the diaspora from their class brothers and sisters by urging them to place confidence in and seek the support of the very big-business governments that are imposing the burden of the world capitalist crisis on the working class as a whole and whipping up anti-immigrant prejudice.

Tamil workers and youth in the diaspora should reject this pro-imperialist, communal organization. Their future, including quality jobs and citizenship rights, and the democratic rights of the Tamil people living in the Sri Lanka, will only be secured through the international mobilization of the working class against capitalism. As an essential component of this struggle the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka fights to mobilize the working class and toilers—Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim—against capitalist rule and for the United Socialist States of Lanka and Eelam.

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