

TNA drops opposition to Sri Lankan war crimes whitewash

Wije Dias
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The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the main Tamil bourgeois party in Sri Lanka, initially rejected the final report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) appointed by President Mahinda Rajapakse. In doing so, it appealed for the intervention of major powers to defend “the dignity” of the civilians killed and maimed by the Sri Lankan army during the civil war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

A TNA statement issued on December 19, three days after the publication of the report, declared: “The LLRC has reinforced the fact that those most responsible for the commission of crimes would never be held accountable within Sri Lanka.” The TNA appealed for “the international community” to take steps “to establish an international mechanism for accountability.”

The statement branded the LLRC report a “serious assault on the dignity of the victims of the war” that had “greatly damaged the chances of genuine reconciliation.” The TNA was not concerned about justice for the victims of the war, nor an end to the systematic discrimination against Tamils that provoked the communal conflict. For the TNA, “reconciliation” means a power-sharing arrangement between the Tamil elite and the Colombo government for the mutual exploitation of working people.

The TNA’s statement was another futile appeal to the US, European powers and India, which backed Rajapakse and his war. Its call for “an international mechanism for accountability” was designed to pressure the Colombo government for concessions.

The TNA’s appeal was bound to fail. The US has exploited the issue of “human rights” in Sri Lanka not out of any sympathy for the Tamils but to further its strategic interests in the region. It has used its implicit threat of war crimes trials to pressure the Colombo government to distance itself from the close relations developed with China during the war. India has pursued a similar course.

The international pressure has had its impact. Rajapakse has signalled that he has no wish to sever relations with the Western powers and India. His government faithfully follows the dictates of the International Monetary Fund in the field of economics and continues its military programs with the US and India. Rajapakse established the LLRC as the means of deflecting international criticism of the atrocities carried out by the army during the final months of the war in 2009.

The LLRC report is a whitewash designed to cover up the killing of tens of thousands of Tamil civilians and the gross abuses of democratic rights for which the Rajapakse government and military commanders are responsible (see: “Sri Lankan commission whitewashes war crimes”). The response of the major and regional powers, however, has been muted.

US State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland made no criticism of the LLRC’s findings, simply urging “the Sri Lankan government not only to fulfill all of the recommendations of the report as it stands, but also to address those issues that the report did not cover.”

India was no less conciliatory. In an official communiqué on December 25, the Ministry of External Affairs praised the LLRC for recommending “various

constructive measures for addressing issues related to healing the wounds of the conflict and fostering the process of lasting peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.”

The communiqué declared that India would “remain engaged with them [the Sri Lankan government] through this process and offer our support in the spirit of partnership” in reaching a power-sharing arrangement involving the devolution of limited powers to the island’s northern and eastern provinces.

Rebuffed by the “international community,” the TNA quickly changed its tune. In an interview given to the *Nation* on December 24, TNA leader R. Sambanthan said: “Given the track record of the Sri Lankan state, one has to await the implementation of whatever other recommendations had been made by the LLRC before believing that these would become a reality.”

Having accepted the LLRC as legitimate, the TNA quickly moved to end its four-month boycott of bilateral talks with the government “to find solutions to the Tamil problems.” The negotiations, which began last January, produced no sign of agreement on a power-sharing arrangement because the government has no intention of making even limited concessions to the demands of the Tamil elite.

In August, the TNA submitted its conditions for further talks—the re-merger of the northern and eastern provinces and the granting of land and police powers to the north-east provincial council. In the case of the land and police powers, these stipulations are already incorporated in the 13th amendment to the country’s constitution, but have never been implemented.

The Rajapakse government simply ignored the TNA demands, calculating that the release of the LLRC report would end support for an international inquiry into human rights abuses in Sri Lanka and thus diminish any leverage that the TNA had.

Following the favourable US and Indian responses to the LLRC report, the government hardened its stand on the TNA’s demands. Interviewed by the Indian-based *Deccan Chronicle* late last month, President Rajapakse

effectively ruled out regional autonomy for the North and East, declaring: “The TNA seems to be driven by the Tamil diaspora and has the same attitude as the LTTE.”

At the same time, Rajapakse made a concession to New Delhi, saying that his government always considered India first before turning to other powers. Rajapakse told the newspaper: “Every project that we gave the Chinese we first offered to India, including the big port project in Hambantota.” India responded by announcing that External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna would visit Sri Lanka in the third week of January for talks with the president and opposition parties.

The futility of the TNA’s appeals to the “international community” has once again been demonstrated. The only means for fighting for the basic rights of Tamil workers and youth is a united struggle with their Sinhala and Muslim counterparts on a class basis in the struggle for a socialist alternative to reactionary capitalist rule in Sri Lanka. The TNA, which represents the privileged Tamil elite, is organically opposed to this fight.



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