TamilNet criticises WSWS article for opposing separatist program

K. Ratnayake
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A comment published on the *TamilNet* web site critical of the WSWS article "Sri Lankan defence secretary expresses fears of social unrest" reveals the class hostility of the social layers it represents—the Tamil bourgeoisie and well-off middle classes—toward the working class and the struggle for socialism.

The WSWS article focussed on a lecture delivered by Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse to military officers studying at the Kotelawala Defence University. The purpose of the lecture was to prepare the military to suppress a future uprising of workers and youth, and to maintain the repressive military occupation in the North and East.

The *TamilNet* comment, which quotes an unnamed "Eezham [Eelam] activist from Jaffna," objected to the WSWS article's emphasis on class issues, declaring that it could have been "a decent assessment" if it had "taken into account the Eezham Tamils' struggle for independence."

Later the "activist" makes his stance more explicit, writing: "Tamils can politically support a leader or intellectual of progressive Sinhala politics only on the condition that he or she recognises the Eezham Tamil nation's right to self-determination and sovereignty over their historic homeland."

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the WSWS reject the entire framework of poisonous communal politics that underlines this argument. The SEP and its forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), have an unblemished history of defending the democratic rights of Tamils and opposing the Colombo government's criminal war in the North and East. But we have always insisted that the democratic rights of working people—Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim alike—can only be defended through a unified movement of the working class, politically independent of all sections of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, as part of the fight for socialism in Sri Lanka and internationally.

The SEP's perspective has been confirmed by the bitter experiences of the protracted war that ended with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009. The "Eezham activist," *TamilNet* and the various Tamil bourgeois parties can keep peddling the lie that some form of "self-determination," or a separate capitalist state, is the sole solution for Tamils, only by maintaining a complete silence on the political lessons of the war. The LTTE based its entire strategy on seeking to carve out an independent Tamil Eelam and this produced a disaster for working people.

Successive Colombo governments were responsible for starting and ruthlessly prosecuting the war. However, their ideology of Sinhala supremacism was directed not only against Tamils, but against the working class. Confronted with the resistance of workers and the masses, both United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) governments invariably whipped up anti-Tamil communalism to divide the working class and maintain bourgeois rule.

In the 1940s, the Trotskyist Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) fought to unify workers in Sri Lanka and the subcontinent against British colonial rule on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective. Faced with an insurgent working class, one of the UNP government's first actions after formal independence in 1948 was to disenfranchise about one million Tamil plantation workers. The hostility of Tamil bourgeoisie to the working class was summed up in the decision by the Tamil Congress of G. G. Ponnambalam to support the reactionary citizenship bills.

The dissolution of the BLPI into the opportunist LSSP and its subsequent political backsliding proved to be a catastrophe for the working class. The entry of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) into the bourgeois government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964 was a historic betrayal of Trotskyism. It generated great political confusion among workers and opened the door for petty-bourgeois, communal-based politics—both the Sinhala populism of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Tamil separatism of groups such as the LTTE.

The Eezham activist casts a slur on the RCL/SEP by lumping it together with "the 'Trotskyite' leaders like [LSSP leader] Colvin R. de Silva or 'Stalinist' leaders of the JVP." The RCL was the only party that opposed the LSSP's betrayal, drew the necessary political lessons and waged an intransigent political fight to unite workers against all forms of nationalism and communalism—including that of the JVP and LTTE. The record is available for all to study in the *Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*.

The Eezham activist falsely claims that the program of Tamil separatism represents the interests of all Tamils. In fact, it stands for the interests of the venal Tamil bourgeoisie, which sought a separate state to guarantee its "right" to exploit Tamil workers and the poor. This was the basis on which the LTTE conducted its war and led the Tamil masses into a terrible blind alley.

The LTTE's defeat in 2009 was not primarily a military question, but resulted from its class outlook and politics. Like all

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bourgeois nationalist organisations, the LTTE was organically incapable of making any class appeal to the working class. Fearful of any independent movement of the masses, it resorted to anti-democratic methods of rule in areas under its control. It forcibly recruited youth as fighters, taxed people to the hilt and violently suppressed its political critics and rivals.

To divert popular discontent among the Tamil masses, the LTTE resorted to increasingly reactionary methods to whip up communal hatred. It blamed the "Sinhala people" as a whole, including Sinhala workers and rural poor, for the war and the crimes of the Colombo government.

The LTTE sent suicide bombers to blow up workers and poor farmers, brutally killing hundreds of Sinhalese. *TamilNet* denounced Sinhala workers and peasants for the "moral crime of participating in the colonisation of Tamil homeland of Eezham Tamils." This was to justify the LTTE's violent attacks on poor peasants who had been settled by the Colombo government in northern and eastern areas. The LTTE also drove Tamil-speaking Muslims from Jaffna, falsely accusing them of backing the Colombo government. All this played directly into the hands of the Colombo political establishment as it sought to justify its brutal war.

The LTTE's hostility to the working class was sharply expressed in its arrest in 1998 of five RCL members in Kilinochchi for the "crime" of opposing its separatist program and fighting for the unification of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers against the Colombo government, oppression and the war. The LTTE feared the RCL's socialist program was getting a sympathetic hearing among Tamil workers and youth, and only released its members after an extensive international campaign. (See: "The SEP and the fight for the Socialist United States of Sri Lanka and Eelam")

The LTTE always pinned its hopes for a separate Tamil Eelam on support from India and the major imperialist powers. As a result, its "foreign policy" was invariably based on short-sighted pragmatism. It was caught completely unprepared by the shift in international relations that followed the end of the Cold War. Its assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, which it later identified as a blunder, weakened its position in India and on the international arena.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the LTTE manoeuvred to avoid becoming a target of the US "war on terrorism." It signed a ceasefire in 2002, and abandoned its demand for an independent Eelam, in a rush to join the "peace process" sponsored by the major imperialist powers. The talks soon broke down when it became evident that the US and India would only allow the LTTE a relatively minor role in any settlement.

When President Mahinda Rajapakse restarted the war in 2006, the political bankruptcy of the LTTE was laid bare. It was utterly incapable of making any appeal to the working class and oppressed masses in Sri Lanka, the subcontinent and internationally. It treated the Tamil masses in areas under its control with complete contempt, herding them from one area to another. As the Sri Lankan forces launched their final offensives in 2009, the LTTE was left making futile appeals to the very "international community" that was providing diplomatic, financial and military support to the Rajapakse government.

In the aftermath of the war, all the Tamil bourgeois parties continue to look to the imperialist powers to support some form of "self-determination." They have latched onto the fact the US is exploiting the "human rights" issue to put pressure on the Rajapakse government to distance itself from rival China. In doing so, the Tamil National Alliance and other parties are lining up with US imperialism as it prepares for conflict against China after a decade of brutal neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

The Eezham activist wants to keep Tamil workers and youth shackled to this bankrupt perspective, even as the working class in Sri Lanka and internationally faces great dangers, amid the worst breakdown of global capitalism since the 1930s. As our article warned, the Rajapakse government, like its counterparts around the world, is seeking to impose the burden of the capitalist crisis on working people and will not hesitate to use the police-state apparatus built up during decades of war to suppress any resistance.

Confronting growing opposition from workers and young people, the Rajapakse government is resorting to the reactionary communal politics—backing various Sinhala chauvinist organisations that are whipping up anti-Muslim and anti-Tamil sentiment. The answer is not to respond with Tamil or Muslim communalism, but to fight for the unity of the working class, which is the only social force capable of defending democratic rights.

The SEP rejects the claim of the Eezham activist that the failure to support the demand for a separate Eelam means support for "the unitary genocidal Sri Lankan state." The SEP supports neither the Sri Lankan capitalist state nor the demand for a capitalist Eelam. We have consistently fought for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Sri Lankan military forces from the North and East, not to support the creation of a separate Eelam, but to unify and mobilise the working class, at the head of the rural masses, in a revolutionary struggle to establish the Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam.

Our perspective is based on Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution—the correctness of which has been repeatedly confirmed in the course of the past century. All factions of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—have proven again and again their utter incapacity to meet the aspirations of working people for basic democratic rights and decent living standards. These aspirations will only be met through the fight for a workers' and peasants' government to carry out the complete reorganisation of society along socialist lines, as part of the fight for socialism throughout South Asia and internationally.

We call on workers and youth to draw the necessary lessons, study our history and program, and to join and build the SEP as the revolutionary leadership needed for the struggles ahead.

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