

Sri Lanka: Leading Tamil party gives ultimatum for power-sharing deal

W.A. Sunil
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Resolutions passed at the 15th national convention of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), a party of Sri Lanka's Tamil elite, have set a January deadline for the government to offer a power-sharing deal. ITAK is the dominant organisation in the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a coalition of Tamil bourgeois parties. Its demands are in line with mounting pressure by the US and Indian governments on Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse.

ITAK's three-day convention in Vavuniya earlier this month adopted 15 resolutions. The final resolution declared that if the government continued "suppressing our people, grabbing more land, destroying our people's wealth, subjecting our women and children to abuse and keep postponing the achieving of a political solution" the party will "commence a non-violent struggle in the lines of Mahatma Gandhi from January next year."

The TNA, including ITAK, acted as the parliamentary mouthpiece of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) until its military defeat in May 2009. After the LTTE's defeat, the TNA began calling for "internal self-determination," meaning a substantial devolution of power within a "united" Sri Lanka.

While President Rajapakse, under diplomatic pressure from the US and India, promised a power-sharing deal with the TNA after the war, his administration maintained de-facto military rule in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The TNA won the last year's Northern provincial council elections but Colombo refused to grant any real power to the council, marginalising the Tamil elite.

ITAK has exposed the government's repressive measures in these provinces and highlighted the plight of the war devastated people. The organisation has

demanded an end to military rule, the immediate repeal of the country's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act and resettlement of families displaced by the war.

ITAK's principal concern, however, is not the democratic and social rights of workers and poor in the North and East but securing a favorable deal for the Tamil elite. Its call for "internal self-determination" is for devolution of power along the lines of 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord. One of the resolutions passed at ITAK's conference called on India and "the international community" to pressure Colombo not to breach the provisions of this accord but to implement it in full.

The 1987 Indo-Lanka accord was aimed at defending Sri Lankan state and disarming the LTTE, with limited concessions granted to the Tamil elite through the provincial council system, which was established under the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution.

New Delhi was anxious to prevent political instability in its southern state of Tamil Nadu where there was growing mass opposition to the military repression in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is located in close proximity to Tamil Nadu and its people are ethnically related to Sri Lankan Tamils.

The Northern provincial council was established through a merger of the North and East areas in 1988 but following Sinhala chauvinist agitation Colombo dissolved the council. In 2006 the North and East were de-merged into two separate provinces via a judicial order favouring two Sinhala chauvinist groups—the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and Jathika Hela Urumaya.

This month's ITAK convention also passed a resolution stating that Sri Lanka's "national question" could only be resolved "through the maximum devolution of power to the merged northeast province."

It called for Tamil and Muslim groups and “all progressive forces” to join forces and fight for a “new constitutional arrangement.”

“Maximum possible devolution” will not resolve any of the basic issues facing the Tamil masses. Its real purpose is to create the conditions for the Tamil bourgeoisie to deal directly with international capital and to exploit working people in North and East.

The ITAK national convention explicitly thanked the US and other countries for passing the UN Human Rights Council resolution on Sri Lanka in March 2014 and pledged to “assist the international inquiry” into Colombo’s war crimes.

The UN estimates that around 40,000 people may have been killed during the final months of the Sri Lankan military offensive against the separatist LTTE. While the US and other imperialist powers, as well as a China and India, backed the war against the LTTE, the Obama administration is now cynically using Colombo’s war crimes for its own purposes.

Washington is now pressing Colombo to reach an agreement with the TNA. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after a discussion with TNA leaders last month, has again called on the Rajapakse government to implement the 13th amendment.

As part of its “pivot to Asia” against China, the Obama administration is feigning concern over Sri Lankan war crimes to pressure the Rajapakse government to break its close relations with Beijing developed during the war against the LTTE.

Caught up in Washington’s geo-political manoeuvres against China, the Rajapakse government has shown signs of lining up behind the anti-China pivot in order to win Obama administration support. If Rajapakse toes the line, Washington will quietly drop its allegations of human rights violations against Colombo.

ITAK’s appeal to so-called “progressive forces” is directed towards pseudo-lefts such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the United Socialist Party (USP), which have endorsed the bogus US human rights campaign and back the establishment of a bourgeois administration in the North and East.

Sri Lankan defense secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse immediately seized on the ITAK convention to whip up communal tensions. He told the *Island* that the ITAK resolutions “should be studied together with the LTTE’s Interim Self-Governing Authority proposals”

issued in 2003. These resolutions, he declared, would produce fresh “political turmoil” in the country and called for “a tangible campaign to neutralise ITAK’s threat.”

Rajapakse’s provocative comments are aimed at further inciting the anti-Tamil communalism. Over the past year, the government, in league with Sinhala chauvinist groups, has claimed that the LTTE is “reviving” and unleashed various repressive measures. This campaign is aimed at dividing the working class and undermining the growing mass opposition to the government’s austerity measures.

For its part, ITAK is deeply opposed to the unity of the Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking working class. Its principal concern is to win the support of imperialism for the establishment of an autonomous province with significant powers so that it can better benefit from the exploitation of the Tamil masses.

Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers must reject the chauvinist campaign of the government and Sinhala extremist groups as well as the reactionary nationalist agenda of ITAK and the TNA. Anti-Tamil discrimination is rooted in the capitalist profit system with the Sinhala and Tamil bourgeoisie elites both viewing the working class as a threat to their class interests.

The only way to eliminate anti-Tamil discrimination is in a unified struggle across ethnic lines for a workers’ and peasants’ government—a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam—as part of the fight for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

This is the revolutionary internationalist perspective of the Socialist Equality Party, which has consistently fought against all forms of communalism and demanded the complete withdrawal of the military from the North and East. We urge workers and youth to study the SEP’s program, join its ranks and fight for this socialist alternative.



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