

Tamil National Alliance presents pro-imperialist manifesto in Sri Lankan elections

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5 August 2015

On July 25, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which represents the Sri Lankan Tamil elites, presented a reactionary election manifesto for the Sri Lankan parliamentary elections at a press conference in the northern Tamil-majority city of Jaffna.

In the face of rising social anger in Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, the TNA backs the government in Colombo, which was installed through a US-engineered regime-change operation in January's presidential elections. The TNA insists that this government will provide an opportunity for a power-sharing settlement benefiting the Tamil people.

The manifesto fully corresponds to the instructions issued by US Secretary of State John Kerry during his visit to Sri Lanka in May. After meeting a TNA delegation, Kerry said the TNA needed to work with the "the new government's initiative towards an amicable solution in the interests of the country."

According to M.A. Sumanthiran, a member of the delegation that met Kerry, the US Secretary of State said "he was not asking the Tamils to give up their stand on issues of concern to them, but to work towards a mutually acceptable settlement with the Sinhalese majority."

The TNA openly boasts of its role in the US-assembled political line-up that secured President Maithripala Sirisena's election in January. It writes: "We made a significant contribution towards the achievement of these objectives on the 8th of January 2015." In that operation, President Mahinda Rajapakse, who was closely aligned to China, was replaced by Maithripala Sirisena, in accordance with the US "pivot to Asia" and its preparations for war against China.

TNA leader Sampanthan said: "We will not stop our journey toward a political solution. We strongly believe the parliamentary election results will be similar, confirming the January 8 victory of Maithripala Sirisena. If not, then we would support Maithripala forming a strong government in the parliament."

Since Sirisena's installation as president, Sri Lankan foreign policy has drastically shifted toward strengthening

US influence in the Indian Ocean. Washington is closely monitoring the election, hoping to intensify the grip it secured through January's regime-change operation. Dennis Blair, a former US Director of National Intelligence, commented recently: "Sri Lanka's parliamentary election on August 17 will determine whether the reforms of President Maithripala Sirisena, himself elected to the surprise of most observers in January, will continue."

The TNA manifesto validates the Sirisena government's policies toward Tamils, writing that "since January 2015, decisions have been taken by the new regime for the return of lands to, and the resettlement of, the displaced Tamil People."

In fact, during the past six months, nothing substantial has changed in the lives of the thousands of people who met untold suffering during the bloody civil war waged by successive Colombo governments to suppress the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. Except for a few token gestures, the new regime has continued the racist politics of Rajapakse's administration.

Sirisena took office with a "100-days program" promising to "reinstate democracy," raise living standards and increase the salaries of public and private sector employees. His promises have not produced any appreciable benefits for the working class, and new attacks are being prepared on working people, both Sinhala and Tamil.

The parliamentary elections are designed to allow the regime to re-brand its policies, scale back the minimal concessions it has made, and, as in Greece, introduce painful austerity measures to meet the demands of the International Monetary Fund and global finance capital.

The TNA manifesto strongly suggests that Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will remain in power after the elections to initiate "a comprehensive program for the development of the North and the East."

The TNA's proposed development program—including an international airport, sea ports and fishery harbours—is designed to promote the exploitation of cheap Tamil labour. Since the end of the civil war in 2009, the government has

established small-scale industrial units producing mainly garments for export. The architecture of these units resembles prisons; they employ workers for lower wages than free-trade zones in other parts of the country.

The utterly anti-working class character of the TNA's nationalist perspective underscores the political significance of the Socialist Equality Party's (SEP) campaign in the current elections. The SEP is the only party fighting for the unity of the Tamil and Sinhalese working class in struggle against war and austerity, based on a revolutionary socialist perspective. The SEP is running candidates in Jaffna, Nuwara Eliya and Colombo.

The TNA's program testifies to the political bankruptcy of Tamil nationalism, which has been increasingly evident since the defeat of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009. According to the Tamil daily *Virakesari*, TNA leader Sampanthan told a group of TNA members and supporters: "We can't continue our political journey, we have to bring it to an end. If the Tamil people present us with an overwhelming victory, electing 20 of our members to parliament, we would present them a political solution before the end of 2016."

Sampanthan's "political solution" is an imperialist-sponsored power-sharing agreement with the government in Colombo. Such an agreement would provide a greater share to the Tamil bourgeoisie in the exploitation of their "own" people. Tamil workers and poor must reject such an agreement, which offers nothing to them, and prepare for a struggle, together with their class brothers and sisters of all ethnicities, against austerity and the rising danger of war.

The TNA manifesto begins by recounting the negotiations and agreements between Tamil nationalists and successive Sri Lankan governments ever since formal independence in 1948. The political record of Tamil nationalism is a series of disappointments, failures and betrayals in seeking power-sharing bargains with the Sinhalese bourgeoisie.

Since 1968, the Tamil nationalist parties have cited the "breach of promises" of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and United National Party (UNP), the main Sinhalese capitalist parties, to justify their stance of supposedly refusing to enter into such agreements. During the past ten years, the TNA leadership stressed that mediation by the "international community," that is the major imperialist powers, was a precondition for any negotiations with the government.

In January, however, the TNA engaged in closed-door negotiations with the UNP and SLFP leaderships, apparently with US mediation, to extend unconditional support to Sirisena's campaign. Media reports in January stated that Sumanthiran, a leading TNA member, demanded a ministry during the negotiations. The TNA quickly denied the

reports, however, claiming that no secret agreements or promises of ministerial positions were behind its position in the presidential election.

Except for a brief remark that the LTTE "continued its armed struggle," the manifesto is silent on the history of the LTTE's demand for a separate state. The bloody defeat of the LTTE in the civil war was primarily an outcome of the bankruptcy of its Tamil nationalist perspective. In the Tamil North and East of Sri Lanka, the LTTE established its political authority by suppressing the workers and poor, and killing its political opponents.

The LTTE alienated the Sinhala workers by staging periodical brutal attacks on Sinhalese civilians. For international support, the LTTE relied on US and European imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie, even after they banned the organisation and extended full diplomatic and military aid to Colombo against the LTTE. The result was a catastrophic defeat for the LTTE in the civil war and the virtual annihilation of its forces on the island, together with the deaths of thousands of civilians, in a massacre by the Sri Lankan military.

The TNA's response is to appeal to the United States and other imperialist powers to intervene into Sri Lankan politics, supposedly to ensure a lasting peace in the war-torn country. The manifesto states: "The TNA is firmly of the view that international auspices are necessary to achieve permanent peace through genuine reconciliation, thereby enabling all peoples living in Sri Lanka to live as equal citizens."

Even after its pleas to the imperialist powers at the end of the civil war went unanswered, the TNA is again making bankrupt and dangerous appeals for imperialist intervention in the politics of Sri Lanka. The experience of Washington's neo-colonial interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Pakistan give the lie to the TNA's worship of the "international community." The imperialist powers manipulated ethnic divisions and religious conflicts to dominate these countries, resulting in the killing of hundreds of thousands of people.



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