Tamil People's Forum sets a new nationalist trap for Sri Lankan workers

V. Gnana
29 December 2015

On December 19, the Tamil Peoples Forum (TPF), a new organisation led by North Province Chief Minister Vigneswaran, was formed. This is a shabby maneuver to give a facelift to the bankrupt politics of Tamil nationalism, even as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) is ever more discredited by its support for the US-backed government of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Supporters of the Forum include representatives from parties that are already constituents of the TNA, or Tamil National People's Front, which broke away from the TNA in 2010. It also includes representatives of civil organizations, religious officials, professionals, Jaffna University lecturers and reporters. These representatives of the Tamil bourgeoisie all seek to benefit from Washington's provocative “pivot to Asia” aimed to isolate China and its moves to set up a pliant client regime in Sri Lanka.

The TPF's founders stressed that they have no basic political differences with the TNA. Suresh Premachandran, one of the founders of the Forum, said, “[T]his organisation is not an organisation that would trouble the Alliance. Even providing an appearance of opposition to Alliance is a meaningless action.”

The other founders of the Forum said, “[T]he Forum is neither a political party nor an initial meeting to establish an alternative leadership."

Indeed, the TPF serves to provide only a new political cover for the TNA's continuing moves to divide workers in Sri Lanka along ethnic lines. The Alliance has been involved in racist politics, like the Sinhala capitalist parties that are opposed to the unity of the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers and oppressed.

After the killings of tens of thousands of Tamils in 30 years of civil war and the utter military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, Tamil nationalists have loudly insisted that the “international community” would provide a “political solution” to the Tamil people.

This year's events have shown that the TNA did not seek to obtain legitimate democratic demands of Tamil people, but the selfish interests of the Tamil bourgeoisie and privileged upper middle class.

From providing unconditional support to the US-led regime change operation that led to Sirisena's victory in the January 8 presidential election, to publicly supporting the right-wing United National Party (UNP) in the August 17 parliamentary elections, the TNA organized its work around establishing a pro-US regime.

In October, the UN Human Rights Council unanimously passed a US-sponsored resolution covering up the war crimes committed by the government and army during the civil war. The TNA worked directly with Washington and the Sri Lankan government in Colombo to prepare this resolution. This confirmed that the TNA's earlier demands for an international tribunal were not in earnest, but rather a weapon used to exert pressure to establish US interests in Sri Lanka.

Two months ago a delegation led by TNA leader Sambanthan met with political prisoners demanding a general amnesty and urged them to end their hunger strike. They also promised them that President Srisena had pledged to release all the prisoners soon. Not only have the prisoners not been released yet, but the government has declared several times that there are no political prisoners in Sri Lanka.

The TNA also supported the government's austerity budget this month from the opposition benches. Thousands of people came to Colombo and staged protests against this budget, which accelerates attacks

© World Socialist Web Site

against workers and other toiling people. Sambanthan dismissed their concerns, telling them: “After traveling a long journey, one cannot hastily break contact with the government.”

After coming to power in January, the Sirisena government let its electoral promises fade away and capitulated to IMF demands for broad attacks on Sri Lankan workers. The current austerity budget is only the beginning.

Six years after the end of the civil war, none of the basic problems facing the masses have been solved, and the situation is explosive. Regarding resettlement of displaced people, 9,700 acres of land in the Jaffna district are still under military control. 9,819 families who could not be resettled are staying in 31 welfare centers and houses of relatives and friends. In the northern province alone, there are at least 30,000 youth and 6,000 graduates who are unemployed.

In the northern province alone, there are about 100,000 war widows. At the President's Commission, 2,500 complaints were recorded regarding disappeared people in Jaffna district. Under the emergency laws, around 300 have been detained without trial on the grounds of suspicion.

This social crisis has undermined the TNA, which has provided unconditional support to the government. Now the Tamil bourgeoisie is putting forth a new organisation to contain the discontent that is rapidly developing against Tamil nationalism. The TPF's aim is to prevent workers, youth and students from making a politically conscious break with Tamil nationalism and turning towards a socialist perspective.

The TNA made its programme clear when it said, “The solution to the ethnic problem of the Tamil people is possible only through the strong role of the international community.” By this he meant a strong role for the imperialist powers, particularly Washington.

Tamil National People's Front leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, who played a significant role in the formation of the Forum, said, “Tamil National Alliance's activities is not to approach the international community from the standpoint of the requirements of the Tamil and interests of the Tamils. On the contrary, it is carrying forward to Tamil people the agenda desired by the international community.”

A month before Northern Province Chief Minister Vigneswaran took the lead in the formation of the Forum, Gajendrakumar said, “Either he [Vigneswaran] should take the leadership of the Alliance or should leave the Alliance and take leadership, only that promotes the interests of Tamils and his position. For that our party will give full support.”

The tactical differences within the TNA leadership between Vigneswaran, Sambanthan and Sumanthiran revolves around how to manage their relations to US imperialism and the Sri Lankan state. Washington, which has invested huge efforts to consolidate the regime change it effected in Sri Lanka with Sirisena's election in January, would make full efforts to prevent the weakening of the government as a result of a crisis in the TNA.

Despite the criticisms Vigneswaran has made now and then against the government, he speaks for privileged interests of the Tamil bourgeoisie. A former judge, he served as a representative of the regime in Colombo until he took over his role as chief minister in the north.

Less than a day after helping form the TPF, on December 20, Vigneswaran helped inaugurate the Kargils bank in Jaffna alongside Sirisena. He declared, “I am very glad to participate in this event along with the honourable president. … I am not opposed to Sinhala people, but I am not in agreement with Sinhala construction workers working in the north.”

The TPF's claims that talks with the “international community” and the Indian bourgeoisie can solve the ethnic divisions inside Sri Lanka amount to a reactionary program to divide the Sri Lankan working class and throw dust in the eyes of the Tamil toiling masses.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site