

Tamil People's Council provides political cover for pro-US Sri Lankan regime

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15 October 2016

On September 24, the Tamil People's Council (TPC) of Tamil nationalist factions called a "Ezhuga Thamizh 2016" ('Rise up Tamils 2016') rally. Their goal was incite anti-Sinhala sentiment and divide the working class, amid rising popular opposition to the US-backed regime of President Maithripala Sirisena, applauded by Tamil nationalists for producing "good governance."

Social anger against the Sirisena-TNA regime is unprecedented, as workers and students protest against social cuts across the country, in the face of violent state repression. In the North and East, where the Tamil minority has remained under military occupation since the end of the civil war, families are demanding that Sirisena release their relatives disappeared by the authorities.

The TPC aims to provide political cover for the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which works with Sirisena to implement IMF austerity measures and undermine democratic rights, and above all to promote the US "pivot to Asia" to prepare war against China. This is the international basis for the Tamil nationalist groups' alignment with Washington, the Indian government and the Sirisena regime.

The rally's organisers claimed that the Tamil people has been oppressed by the Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarian state structure of Sri Lanka for decades, that the "Ezhuga Thamizh" rally is a signal to Sirisena in Colombo that the TPC will never give up on the Tamil population's political aspirations.

They declared that "a Unitary State structure would never be the solution to the Tamil National question," adding that "a viable solution to the Tamil National question could only be achieved by establishing a sovereign federal unit through recognizing the Tamil people of the North and East as a distinct nation, while also acknowledging and respecting their right to self-determination, as proposed in the constitution proposals submitted by the Tamil People's Council (TPC)."

The TPC's call for "self-determination" and establishing a separate nation to resolve Tamil issues and its anti-Sinhala comments are a reactionary fraud aimed at dividing Tamil workers and youth entering into struggle from their Sinhala and Muslim class brothers and sisters. It solely serves the privileged interests of the Tamil bourgeoisie, striving to exploit workers, primarily Tamils, on behalf of international finance capital.

As the TNA is discredited, the TPC plays the chief role in containing rising social anger. The TPC was formed last December by Northern Province Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran, who was elected to the Northern Provincial Council on the TNA ticket in September 2013; the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF); different Tamil petty-bourgeois groups like PLOTE (Peoples Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam) of Tharmalingam Sitharthan, the EPRLF (Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front); and various civil society organisations.

There are no significant political differences between the TNA and TPC, however: both are oriented to Sirisena's regime and the geostrategic interests of US imperialism and its main regional ally, India. The TPC's leaders always make clear that they support the TNA. As the TPC was formed, EPRLF leader Suresh Premachandran said, "the Council is not a rival organisation to the Tamil National Alliance (TNA)."

P. Lakshman, a Jaffna-based cardiologist and co-chair of the TPC, bluntly said, "We will try to help the TNA to strengthen the latter's position."

These forces' bankruptcy has been utterly exposed since the end of the civil war in 2009, which saw the crushing defeat of separatists of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—the outcome of the LTTE's Tamil-chauvinist perspective. Incapable of making any progressive appeal to Sinhala and Tamil workers, and deserted by its major-power patrons, especially India, the LTTE was massacred in a Sri Lankan army offensive

backed by all the major world powers.

Since the US announced its “pivot to Asia” in 2011, the geo-strategic calculation underlying the decision of Washington and New Delhi to back the massacre of the LTTE has become ever clearer. They could not tolerate developing ties between Colombo and Beijing—which provided cheap loans for port and infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, as part of what became China’s Silk Road Economic Belt and “One Belt, One Road” initiative, announced in 2013.

The massacre of the LTTE provided the venal TNA and TPC forces with an opportunity to closely align their policies with the interests of imperialism, and they rapidly embraced it. When Washington sought to cut Colombo-Beijing economic ties by pressuring Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse, hypocritically threatening to investigate possible Sri Lankan war crimes during the anti-LTTE offensive Washington had itself supported, these forces rallied in support.

Even before supporting the installation of Sirisena in a US-backed regime change operation in 2015, they constantly appealed to Washington and the European imperialist powers to pressure Rajapakse based on human rights issues. Premachandran told the BBC, “the international community, including US, Europe and India, has to exert pressure on Sri Lanka to address humanitarian concerns and for political reforms.”

The Tamil nationalists, who worked to subordinate the democratic and social aspirations of the working class to the reactionary foreign policy of Washington and New Delhi, are bitterly hostile to the workers.

Since the initial years of the Sri Lankan civil war in the 1980s, they have functioned as assets of Indian and at times Sri Lankan intelligence, violently hostile to independent political struggle of the working class. While they enjoyed the support of traditional Tamil bourgeois parties like the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Tamil petty bourgeois groups including the LTTE, PLOTE and EPRLF were cultivated by New Delhi as assets.

After the anti-Tamil ethnic riots of July 1983 in Sri Lanka, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India’s main intelligence agency, proposed Sri Lanka operations to finance, train and arm Tamil petty nationalist groups, such as the LTTE, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), the PLOTE and the EPRLF.

This strategy aimed to exert pressure on Colombo, as the Indian ruling class became deeply concerned over then-President J. R. Jayawardene’s geostrategic

orientation. Jayawardene developed ties to US imperialism and India’s arch-enemies in Asia, Pakistan and China, as he announced free-market policies opening the island for foreign investment and whipped up Sinhala chauvinism. New Delhi, based on its Cold War-era alliance with the Soviet bureaucracy, saw Jayawardene’s orientation as a major threat.

The LTTE, PLOTE, and EPRLF emerged as thuggish groups, using murderous violence against any movement that cut across the foreign policy of the states they were aligned with—primarily India, and also Sri Lanka. The Indian ruling class and the Tamil petty-bourgeois groups exploited rising social anger in the North and East to promote a perspective of ethnic war based on Tamil chauvinism.

These groups’ internal splits and faction fights were settled by bloody battles among themselves, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of youths, during the 1980s. After murdering the bulk of its opponents, the LTTE took the dominant position.

The 1987 Indo-Lankan accord, supported by the LTTE, brought the Indian army into the North of Sri Lanka, supposedly on a peacekeeping mission. The truce lasted only few months, as fighting between the LTTE and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) erupted, killing thousands of civilians. RAW formed a Tamil National Army, recruiting forces from groups including the PLOTE and EPRLF to wage war against the LTTE.

Tamil paramilitary forces like the Three Stars and the Mandayan Group led by the EPRLF’s Premachandran, for their part, collaborated with the IPKF. Premachandran operated his group at Asoka Hotel in Jaffna, turning it into a torture camp where hundreds of suspected LTTE members were tortured and murdered.

These forces’ bloody history during the civil war is a further indication of the reactionary role they will seek to play against the working class in Sri Lanka today.



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