

Nine years since Sri Lankan civil war ended in massacre of Tamils

K. Nesan, V. Gnana
18 May 2018

Thousands of people around the world are gathering today to mark the anniversary of one of the most infamous massacres of the 21st century. After 26 years of a bloody civil war, the Sri Lankan army cornered over 40,000 Tamils, including the surviving leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), on Sri Lanka's north-eastern Indian Ocean coast at Mullivaikal. Without giving any warning, it launched a furious artillery barrage to murder everyone trapped there.

No one at Mullivaikal escaped the carnage. The military indiscriminately shelled homes, hospitals and civilians as well as bunkers where children, pregnant women and the elderly had tried to take refuge. Nearly a decade later, the Sri Lankan army is still sealing off the area, barring families of the victims from returning to grieve for their loved ones.

In a gruesome ceremony broadcast live on television to terrorize the population, the Sri Lankan government brought in two LTTE turncoats to identify LTTE leader Velupillai Prabakharan's remains. After they confirmed before the television cameras that the body lying in the mud was indeed Prabakharan, the army burned the corpse.

Today, this massacre is remembered with horror by millions of workers in Sri Lanka—Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim alike—and around the world. It tragically confirmed the warnings of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka). In the former colonial countries, the capitalist ruling classes are historically incapable of creating a democratic regime or uniting the population across national and religious lines; these tasks fall to the working class, mobilized internationally in a revolutionary struggle for socialism.

The Sri Lankan regime in Colombo that carried out the Mullivaikal massacre is not alone in bearing

political responsibility for it: governments around the world are implicated. India, China, Pakistan and the imperialist powers all gave Colombo military and diplomatic support as it launched its final assault on the LTTE. The United States, Britain, France and Canada ignored mass protests by Tamils calling on them to intercede with the Sri Lankan government to save the innocent people trapped in Mullivaikal.

With unsurpassed cynicism, then-US President Barack Obama spoke the day before the massacre to call on the LTTE to lay down their arms, protect civilians in Mullivaikal and “put them first.”

As for the LTTE, its defeat originated first and foremost in its nationalist and separatist perspective of building a Tamil capitalist enclave in north-eastern Sri Lanka. On May 21, 2009, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote: “The LTTE fighters and their leadership have been massacred in cold blood by the Sri Lankan military. Sympathy for the plight of the Tamil people and for the cruel fate of fighters of the LTTE, however, must not prevent fundamental lessons from being drawn.

“From the outset of the civil war 26 years ago, the LTTE’s armed struggle was wedded to a strategy of winning the support of one or another of the major powers for setting up a statelet in the North and East of the country.

“In 1987, the LTTE’s support for the Indo-Lankan accord brought the Indian army into the North of Sri Lanka where it slaughtered thousands of Tamil civilians. The LTTE had agreed to subordinate itself to the Indian bourgeoisie in the vain hope that it would help it create an independent state.

“Over the following decades, the LTTE has appealed for imperialist backing, consistently making it clear that its aim in carving out a mini-state on the island was not

the betterment of the social conditions of the masses of Tamils, but rather the creation of a capitalist economy that would provide cheap labour for international capital.”

The massacre of the LTTE has not, however, granted a new lease on life to the corrupt regime in Colombo. Its attempt to drown the Tamils in blood did not solve problems of poverty and ethnic strife that have bedevilled Sri Lankan capitalism ever since formal independence from Britain.

Since 2009, it neither ended its anti-Tamil communal policies nor improved life in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Thousands displaced during the war still live in temporary shelters and thousands more still await compensation for the destruction of their homes. Mothers are still protesting in front of Hindu temples to demand the return of children kidnapped by the army. Instead of releasing political prisoners after the war, Colombo has arrested and tortured dozens more Tamils.

None of the fundamental contradictions that led to the Sri Lankan civil war have been resolved. As IMF-dictated austerity attacks wages and social conditions and provokes growing anger, Colombo has declared a state of emergency, imposed curfews, and tacitly backed anti-Muslim riots.

At the same time, workers and toiling people in Tamil-majority areas of Sri Lanka are joining a growing wave of protests and strikes across Sri Lanka and the entire Indian subcontinent against austerity and privatizations, amid a global resurgence of the class struggle. These demands will bring the working class into a revolutionary confrontation with the Colombo regime.

In January 2015, a US-engineered regime-change operation ousted President Mahinda Rajapakse, installing Maithripala Sirisena as president, supposedly to bring democracy and “good governance” to Sri Lanka. In fact, Washington aimed to install a regime in Colombo aligned with the US “pivot to Asia” against China.

From the beginning, the government was formed via a fraudulent political manoeuvre, with war criminals in top posts. Sirisena, who oversaw the 2009 massacre as acting defence secretary, took into his cabinet General Sarath Fonseka—the Sri Lankan Army commander who directly planned and executed the massacre. Rajapakse is today the leading bourgeois opposition politician.

Since 2009, moreover, the Tamil nationalists have emerged as open tools of US imperialism. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), formed in 2001 as the LTTE’s political arm, abandoned its demand for a separate state and said it would work within the Sri Lankan unitary state, again relying on intervention by the “international community.” On this basis, it endorsed the US-backed regime change operation and gave up its demands for the prosecution of Sri Lankan war crimes, and the release of political prisoners.

This April, as he voted to support the government during a no-confidence vote in parliament, TNA chief R. Sampanthan bluntly laid out his perspective for profiting from austerity and the growing war tensions in the Indian Ocean region: “We are a small country, but we are both militarily and economically very strategically located in the Indian Ocean region. We can become the economic hub of the Indian Ocean area. We can have access to wide and large markets if our economy can improve, and our economy can improve only if there is genuine peace in this country ...”

A class gulf separates Sri Lanka’s bourgeois factions from the opposition to imperialist war and social austerity that is rising among workers of all ethnicities, across the Indian subcontinent. The critical question is the turn to the international working class and the building of its revolutionary leadership.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality have placed the struggle against war and communalism at the centre of their work. On the anniversary of this horrific massacre, we appeal to workers and youth in Sri Lanka and throughout the Indian subcontinent for their support.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact