

Sri Lankan political crisis exposes bankruptcy of Tamil nationalist parties

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The collapse of the Sri Lankan government on October 26 has exposed the bankruptcy of the Tamil bourgeois nationalists. They promised to work with Sinhala bourgeois politicians in Colombo to satisfy the demands of the Tamil workers and oppressed masses for redress of the terrible conditions they have faced since the bloodbath that ended the 1983–2009 Sri Lankan civil war. This proved to be a fraud. Nearly four years after the installation of a US-backed “Good Governance” regime in Colombo, not a single one of these problems has been solved.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) supported the US-engineered regime change operation that installed President Maithripala Sirisena in January 2015. Now this “national unity” government has collapsed, after Sirisena dismissed Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe of the right-wing United National Party (UNP) and attempted to install Mahinda Rajapakse in his place. As thuggish brawls erupt in the Colombo parliament, the TNA is backing the UNP against Sirisena’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and Rajapakse’s Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP).

The pro-TNA online daily *Tamil Win* boasted that TNA leader Rajavarothiam “Sampanthan has become the guardian of Sri Lanka’s rulers with behind-the-scenes secret agreements.” It wrote that Sampanthan worked with the “international community” to mediate between Sirisena and Wickremesinghe after Sirisena dismissed him. As strikes by fishermen, petroleum workers, tea plantation workers, non-academic and academic university workers erupt together with student protests, the TNA is shifting further to the right.

Events since October 26 have once again powerfully vindicated the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Sri Lanka, Leon Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution. The bourgeoisie in countries of belated development is an appendage of imperialism, incapable of

resolving any democratic issues. Only the SEP’s struggle to unify the working class of all ethnicities across Sri Lanka and India in a struggle for socialist revolution can resolve the burning unresolved issues emerging from the Sri Lankan civil war.

The TNA is responding to the growth of the class struggle by supporting the UNP, a bitter enemy of the working class and of the Tamil population. Its record is clear.

The UNP abolished voting rights of over one million Tamil plantation workers in 1949, crushed the 1980 public sector workers’ strike with mass sackings, and supported anti-Tamil pogroms that triggered the Sri Lankan civil war in 1983. As Sirisena’s ally after January 2015, promising “good governance” in Sri Lanka, it implemented drastic austerity, attacking the living standards of workers and the poor—Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim—across the country.

The TNA’s promises in its 2015 election manifesto proved to be a pack of lies. It pledged to find a “political solution,” fighting for “accountability and reconciliation,” dealing with the “matters for the immediate concern for the Tamil people,” and improving the status of “war widows, orphans, elders and disabled.”

Its central concern was not the Tamil workers and poor, however, but the class interests of a narrow layer of Tamil bourgeois, in Sri Lanka and the international Tamil diaspora, to exploit workers and the poor in Tamil-majority areas. It sought the backing of US imperialism for its deal-making in Colombo, aligning itself with the US-backed UNP, as Washington sought to install in Colombo a regime favorable to its confrontation and war threats against China. Today, this policy carries the TNA into an alliance with the determined enemies of the Tamil working people that it claims to represent.

To understand what the TNA’s manoeuvres signify, it suffices to ask: what has four years of the TNA-backed

“Good Governance” government in Sri Lanka produced for the Tamil population?

Like their Sinhala counterparts, the lives of the majority have worsened, as poverty skyrocketed. The Kilinochchi area has the highest poverty rate in Sri Lanka: 18.2 percent, more than four times the national average. In the Mullaitivu district, where more than 40,000 Tamil civilians were massacred at the end of the war, monthly household income is lowest in the country: 25,526 rupees, compared to a national average of 43,511 rupees.

Most youth work in the cheap labour sector, and thousands of graduates are unemployed. From 2015 to 2018, unemployment in the Jaffna district nearly doubled, from 5.7 to 10.7 percent. The State Board of Investment in September reported that in the “post-war era” after 2009, only 8,754 jobs have been created in the Northern District.

None of the issues left by the civil war and the army’s slaughter of the defeated Tamil-separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has been resolved. Hundreds of Tamil political prisoners who have been held without trial for decades are still jailed, and the North and East are under military occupation.

More than 90,000 war widows still live alone in these regions. This figure does not count the wives of thousands more missing or disappeared men. Some 58,000 households in the Northern Province, or one quarter of the population, are headed by women. They confront enormous suffering: high levels of poverty, and abuse and sexual exploitation by politicians and authorities.

Micro-finance companies grant them tiny loans at exorbitant interest rates. Women used them to start small businesses, mostly in agriculture and poultry, but many could not repay the instalments and saw their ventures fail. More than 60 women have committed suicide in the Eastern Province after they were not able to repay such loans.

According to Amnesty International, more than 100,000 people in the North and East went missing during the civil war. Since February 2017, relatives of the disappeared have mounted roadside protests day and night, demanding to know the whereabouts of their family members. The plight of these protesters evokes broad popular support in the South. Groups of Sinhala workers visiting the North met with the protesters to express their sympathies. In July 2018, for the first time ever, a protest was organised in Colombo in support of the relatives of the disappeared.

The Tamil nationalists have opposed attempts to link these protests to developing strikes and protests in the

South. Instead, they sent small delegations of protesters to symbolic face-to-face meetings with Sirisena. The web site *TamilNet* wrote, “Let the Sinhala nation decide on its fate, keep focus on the Tamil struggle.”

Their record is an indictment of their bankrupt perspective: dividing the workers and oppressed masses along ethnic lines, while scheming each day with Washington and Colombo. They exploited the hopes of Tamil people, promising that a US-sponsored resolution before the UN Human Rights Commission would bring justice for the crimes of the civil war. But the aims of Washington and the Tamil nationalists—to obtain a bourgeois regime in Colombo to promote US interests against China, and the profits of the Tamil capitalists—violently conflicted with such promises.

The entire ruling elite is complicit in the crimes of the Sri Lankan civil war. The TNA’s allies in the UNP, as is well known, enthusiastically supported the final massacre of the LTTE and of Tamil civilians at Mullaitivu in 2009. All the TNA’s Sinhalese allies are politically implicated in this bloodbath. In response to lawsuits filed in 2017 against the former commander of the Sri Lankan army, Sirisena declared: “I state very clearly that I will not allow anyone in the world to touch Jagath Jayasuriya or any other military chief or any war hero in this country.”

The political establishment in Colombo has consistently and vehemently opposed any war crimes investigations—including under the now-defunct “Good Governance” government.

For the Tamil workers and poor, the turn now is to reject the dead end of Tamil nationalism, and make the turn to the working class advocated by the SEP: unity with the struggles of their class brothers and sisters in India and the Sinhalese-majority south of Sri Lanka on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.



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