

The 50th anniversary of the founding of the SEP (Sri Lanka)

The RCL/SEP's struggle against the anti-Tamil civil war

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This is the fifth in a series of articles published by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka to mark the 50th anniversary of its foundation in June 1968.

Established as the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), it was renamed the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in 1996. A statement has already been published to mark the RCL's founding congress on June 16–17, 1968.

These articles elaborate the RCL's principled foundations and draw the essential political lessons from the struggle for these principles over the past 50 years. The RCL was founded on the program and perspective of socialist internationalism that the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which claimed to be a Trotskyist party, had betrayed by entering the bourgeois government of Madam Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964.

Central to the work of the SEP has been the fight for Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, which established that in countries of a belated capitalist development only the working class is capable of leading the struggle for the basic democratic and social rights of the workers and rural toilers as part of the fight for socialism internationally. These lessons are critical for the emerging struggles of the working class, not only in Sri Lanka, but throughout Asia and the world.

Based on the theory of Permanent Revolution, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) and its successor, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), have fought intransigently to defend the democratic rights of the island's Tamil minority against the Sinhala ruling elite's racist discrimination and violence, and to unite the working class, Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim, on the basis of socialist internationalism and in the fight for workers' power.

The RCL-SEP was the only force that fought to mobilise the working class against the nearly three-decade (1983–2009) civil war provoked and prosecuted by the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie. In the face of state repression and violent attacks by both the Sinhala-chauvinist JVP and the Tamil nationalist-separatists of the LTTE, the RCL-SEP fought to arm the working class with the understanding that the war was directed not only against the Tamil masses, but at the working class as a whole—serving as both a political-ideological weapon to incite communalism and divide the working class, and a means to vastly expand the repressive powers of the state.

Bringing to bear the lessons of the Russian Revolution, the struggle against British colonial rule over South Asia, and the entire experience of post-World War II decolonisation, the RCL-SEP made a systematic critique of the petty-bourgeois politics of the LTTE. It thereby demonstrated that the democratic rights of the Tamils could and will only

be secured by the working class through socialist revolution and the overthrow of South Asia's reactionary communal-based state system.

The suppression of the anti-imperialist struggle, the Sri Lankan state, and anti-Tamil chauvinism

The struggle against Sinhala populism and the Pabloite LSSP's craven adaptation to it, and for the class unity of the working class on the basis of socialist internationalism, were central to the founding of the RCL in 1968.

At its founding conference, the RCL warned that the coalition—the alliance between the LSSP and the bourgeois SLFP, soon to be expanded to include the Stalinist Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL)—was mounting a “nationalist campaign” that was “preparing the political ground for a Sinhala-Buddhist dictatorship” in Sri Lanka.

In defining the revolutionary tasks of the working class, the RCL revived and developed the analysis that the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India had made in 1947–48 of the reactionary state-system erected in South Asia by the sub-continent's departing British colonial overlords in connivance with various ethnic and communally-defined factions of the native bourgeoisie.

Hostile to, and organically incapable of, uniting the masses on the basis of an appeal to their class interests in a common struggle against imperialism, landlordism and capitalist exploitation, the Gandhi-Nehru led Indian National Congress betrayed its own program for a united secular India, and in 1947 implemented the communal partition of South Asia into a Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India.

The Sri Lankan bourgeoisie was, if anything, even more craven. As British India was convulsed by mass struggles against colonial rule in the 1930s and 1940s, it clung to the colonial state structures under which Ceylon was governed separately from the mainland; both out of hope they would provide it with a basis for expanding its own privileges, and fear that the anti-imperialist struggle on the mainland would set the masses in Sri Lanka into motion.

No sooner did the British cede political control over the island to the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie than it stripped the Tamil plantation workers, the largest and most powerful section of the working class, of their citizenship rights. The pretext for this anti-democratic act was that they were “foreigners,” because their ancestors had been brought to the island from southern India to serve as the British colonialists’ plantation workforce.

The Sri Lankan Trotskyists, in sharp contrast with the Tamil political establishment, denounced the attack on the rights of the Tamil plantation

workers. They warned that the conception that the “state must be coeval with the nation and the nation with the race” was fascistic. “As amongst the labouring population of this country,” they declared, “we are not ready” to “distinguish between man and man on the ground of his racial origins. We say a worker is, first and foremost, a worker.”

In the ensuing decades, the promotion of poisonous anti-Tamil chauvinism would become ever more vital for the crisis-ridden Sri Lankan bourgeoisie in defending its rule.

In the wake of the 1953 hartal (general strike), Bandaranaike, a leading bourgeois politician who had left the government in 1951, and his Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) launched a chauvinist “Sinhala only” agitation. This was coupled with populist promises of social reform and demagogic denunciations of the right-wing United National Party (UNP) regime.

The LSSP opposed the “Sinhala only” agitation, but increasingly it adapted to the SLFP and its Sinhala populism. Thus when Bandaranaike, who came to power in 1956, made Sinhala the country’s sole official language, the LSSP opposed it not from the standpoint of the class unity of the working class, but on the basis that the SLFP’s Sinhala-first policies would imperil the unity of the Sri Lankan state.

The more the LSSP adopted the national-reformist conception that “socialism” could be realised by pressuring the SLFP and reforms implemented by the Sri Lankan state, the more it gave ground to the SLFP on the question of the democratic rights of the Tamil minority.

In 1964, the LSSP joined the Sinhala populist SLFP government, rescuing capitalist rule and betraying an insurgent movement of the working class. Later that year it endorsed an Indo-Sri Lankan agreement that led to the deportation of half-a-million Tamil plantation workers and family members to India.

The LSSP’s transformation into a prop of bourgeois rule opened the door for the rise of the petty-bourgeois JVP, which eclectically combined Stalinism, Castroism and Sinhala chauvinism. At the same time, its counter-revolutionary alliance with the party that had championed “Sinhala first” shattered the confidence of the Tamil masses that they could look to the working class, under revolutionary socialist leadership, to defend their democratic rights. Ultimately, this would lead to the emergence of the LTTE and like-minded Tamil nationalist-separatist groups from among the student youth of the Jaffna Peninsula.

The RCL’s fight to mobilise the working class in defence of the Tamil masses

In May 1970, less than two years after the founding of the RCL, a second SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition government came to power.

Facing a working class whose militancy was being fueled by the world economic crisis and an international working-class offensive, exemplified by the 1968 French general strike, the SLFP-led coalition immediately ratcheted up communalism.

It convened a bogus constituent assembly and in 1972 rammed through a new anti-democratic constitution. Authored by LSSP leader Colvin de Silva, the new constitution further exalted the privileged status of Sinhala and enthroned Buddhism as the state religion. It led to placing quotas on Tamil university admissions and making Sinhala compulsory for all state employees.

The RCL alone fought to mobilise the working class against the chauvinist constitution and for that reason came under attack. When RCL members in the leadership of the government Printers Union secured the adoption of a resolution opposing the new constitution, the LSSP responded with a witch hunt against the RCL cadre.

As early as 1970, when Colombo sent troops to north to intimidate the Tamil masses, the RCL raised the demand for the immediate withdrawal of the security forces. This would be a central demand of the RCL-SEP throughout the civil war, and, under conditions where tens of thousands of troops continue to be deployed in the majority-Tamil North and East, remains so to this day.

The RCL intervened energetically among Tamil youth radicalised by the repressive actions of the state. In line with Lenin’s writings on the national question, the RCL raised in June 1972 the “negative” demand of self-determination for the Tamil people. This was a means of emphasising the RCL’s implacable opposition to Sinhala supremacism and the Sri Lankan state, and for exposing the Tamil bourgeoisie which was seeking to exploit the anger of the Tamil masses over the attack on their rights to incite Tamil nationalism and thereby pursue its own selfish class aims.

“We Marxists,” declared the RCL, “recognise the right of the Tamil nation to self-determination. At the same time, we emphasise that this right can only be won by mobilising the Sinhalese and Tamil workers for the establishment of a workers’ and peasants’ government based on socialist policies and recognising this right.”

In 1977, an openly right-wing UNP government under J. R. Jayewardene came to power, by exploiting mass opposition to SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition. It had spouted “socialist phrases” while ceaselessly working to place the burden of the capitalist crisis on to the backs of the working class and rural masses. The UNP regime threw Sri Lanka open to unfettered exploitation by global capital, smashed the 1980 public-sector workers’ general strike, and ratcheted up Sinhala communalism so as to channel mounting social tensions and anger in a reactionary direction.

The growth of armed opposition among Tamil youth served as a pretext for the government to deploy the military to the North and East, ram through draconian anti-terrorism laws, and whip up mobs to attack the Tamil minority. In 1979, a leading RCL cadre, R.P. Piyadasa, was brutally murdered by UNP thugs for opposing the government’s assault on the working class and repression of the Tamil minority.

In July 1983, the UNP government seized on an LTTE attack on a military convoy to launch a horrific anti-Tamil pogrom in Colombo.

Because of its intransigent opposition to the government’s anti-Tamil campaign, and indefatigable championing of the unity of the working class, the RCL was a special target of the state-orchestrated violence. The house of K. Ratnayake, the editor of the RCL’s Sinhalese-language paper, Kamkaru Mawatha, was burned to the ground. Government thugs also attempted to destroy the party print shop.

In what amounted to a declaration of war, the government rammed through the Sixth Constitutional Amendment at the beginning of August 1983, making it a criminal offence to advocate the creation of Tamil Eelam, i.e., a separate Tamil state. It then used this anti-democratic law to strip all Tamil United Liberation Front MPs of their parliamentary seats.

The RCL defied state censorship and published a lengthy statement entitled, “Answer to the racist war,” which indicted the government and the opposition parties for inciting the pogrom and calling on the working class to come to the defence of the Tamils.

With the island now plunged into civil war, the RCL redoubled its struggle to mobilise the working class to press for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all security forces from the North and East. At the same time, it systematically refuted the government’s war propaganda and exposed how the war—which was supported by all sections of the Colombo political establishment, including the LSSP and Stalinists—was being used to attack the social and democratic rights of the entire working class.

The WRP’s betrayal of Permanent Revolution

The RCL's struggle to rally the working class to the program of socialist internationalism, under conditions of reaction, ethno-communal polarisation and ultimately civil war, was enormously complicated by the British Workers Revolutionary Party's betrayal of Trotskyism. The WRP, into which the SLL had been liquidated in 1973, increasingly succumbed to nationalism and opportunism as epitomised by its abandonment of the program of Permanent Revolution.

Repudiating the positions they had valiantly defended against the Pabloites in the 1950s and 1960s, Gerry Healy and the other senior leaders of the WRP touted myriad bourgeois nationalist movements, including the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Zimbabwe's ZANU and ZAPU, as instruments for winning national liberation, and promoted the claims of Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi to be fighting imperialism. Moreover, the WRP wantonly abused the political authority that it had accrued due to the SLL's leading role in opposing Pabloite opportunism to impose its right-wing line on the other sections of the International Committee.

Behind the backs of their RCL comrades, the WRP leadership established relations with the LTTE, uncritically promoted it, and helped it craft "socialist" window-dressing for its bourgeois exclusivist program. In 1979 the WRP's Labour Review published an article by LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham in which he twisted the writings of Lenin inside out, depicting him as a vulgar exponent of bourgeois nationalism, not the implacable defender of socialist internationalism for whom the principal question at all times was the "self-determination of the working class."

The RCL was unwavering in its struggle to base its opposition to the war and the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie on the struggle to unite the working class, Sinhala and Tamil, in defence of their independent class interests. For that reason it faced more and more blatant attempts by the WRP to destroy it, including a motion to arbitrarily expel the RCL from the ICFI. The WRP's uncritical support for the LTTE did weaken the RCL, preventing it from subjecting the bourgeois nationalist politics of the LTTE and the other armed Tamil groups to systematic examination and exposure.

In 1985 when it learned of the critique that the US Workers League had made, from 1982 on, of the WRP's opportunist course, the RCL quickly rallied to the support of the Workers League-led ICFI majority.

At the centre of the 1985-86 split with the WRP was the defence of socialist internationalism and the theory of Permanent Revolution as the foundation of all independent class politics and revolutionary strategy in the imperialist epoch. Subsequently, the ICFI and all its sections would intensify their efforts to infuse this understanding into all aspects of their work.

The 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord

A major political task that confronted the RCL in the immediate aftermath of the split with the WRP, and in which the IC's renewed offensive for socialist internationalism found powerful, concrete expression, was the elaboration of a proletarian response to the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord.

The Indian government, in a cynical manoeuvre aimed at advancing the geopolitical interests of the Indian bourgeoisie, had been providing political and military-tactical support to the LTTE and various other Tamil insurgent groups, such as the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). Fearful that the crisis in Sri Lanka was undermining the reactionary South Asian nation-state system as a whole, it abruptly changed course, withdrew its patronage of the Tamil insurgency, and

sought a deal with Colombo.

This shift stunned the Tamil nationalist groups, which had uniformly based their separatist perspective on support from the Indian bourgeoisie. Under the July 1987 Indo-Lankan Accord, which was initially supported by all the Tamil groups, including the LTTE, Indian troops were deployed to the island ostensibly as peacekeepers, but in reality to suppress the Tamil insurgents and ensure the unity of the Sri Lankan capitalist state.

The RCL stood alone in opposing the Indo-Lankan Accord from the standpoint of the interests of the working class. Following intensive discussions with the RCL leadership, the ICFI issued a comprehensive statement entitled "The Situation in Sri Lanka and the Political Tasks of the Revolutionary Communist League."

This statement not only exposed the sordid manoeuvres of Jayewardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. It explained the class logic that lay behind the bloody impasse into which the LTTE had led the Tamil masses. The "bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation," explained the IC statement, "conceives of self-determination exclusively from the standpoint of securing its own national privileges and establishing the best conditions for the exploitation of the workers and peasants within the 'independent country.'" Haunted by the fear that the liberation struggle could become a threat to capitalist rule, it continually "place(s) limits on the mobilisation of the oppressed masses" and pursues a "national exclusivist course," making it "organically incapable of attaining the universalism" required to "liberate their nations from imperialist oppression."

The statement placed the assessment of the events in Sri Lanka within a broader historical balance sheet of the independent states established after World War II in Asia, Africa and the Middle East under the rule of the national bourgeoisie. "Invariably," it explained, "imperialist-sanctioned 'independence' has meant the setting up of bastard states whose very foundations have been built upon a fatal compromise of democratic principles. In this process, the national bourgeoisie has functioned not as the liberator of the oppressed masses, but as a junior partner in imperialist plunder. . . .

"Arising out of such conditions, with the joyous approval of the bourgeoisie, are the horrors of inter-communal warfare. This state of affairs cannot be altered as long as bourgeois rule prevails. The post-independence history of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma—in fact, of every former colonial country in the world—decisively proves that the bourgeoisie cannot establish genuine national unification and political independence."

The IC statement, while reaffirming the RCL's implacable opposition to the communal war waged by Colombo, unambiguously asserted that the democratic rights of the Tamils could be realised only through the unified struggle of the working class for socialism. In opposition to both Sri Lankan and Tamil factions of the bourgeoisie and their rival nationalisms, it advanced the call for the Socialist United States of Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam.

Tragically, this was the last major statement on which Comrade Keerthi Balasuriya, the RCL's general secretary since its foundation in 1968, would work. His death of a coronary thrombosis in December 1987 robbed the Sri Lankan and international working class of a brilliant strategist of world socialist revolution. He was just 39.

Based on the political line elaborated in this statement, the RCL was able to intervene among young Tamil militants who had been forced to take refuge in Europe. The most farsighted drew the conclusion that it was only on the basis of the ICFI's perspective and an orientation to the international working class that the oppression of the Tamils could be ended. These forces joined the ICFI, strengthening its work in both Europe and South Asia.

The RCL/SEP's continuing struggle against the Sri Lankan state, Sinhala supremacism and Tamil nationalism

The LTTE had endorsed the Indo-Lankan Accord, but quickly came into conflict with the Indian troops sent to disarm it. Colombo, meanwhile, seized on the fighting in the north to repudiate its own support for the Accord, on the calculation that through renewed civil war it could scrap the limited concessions the Accord provided the Tamil elite.

Subsequent developments only further exposed the political bankruptcy of the LTTE and its anti-working class character. In the wake of the Stalinist bureaucracies' restoration of capitalism in the former USSR and in China, the LTTE quickly shed any remaining socialist pretenses, as part of its efforts to woo Washington, the other Western powers, and the Indian bourgeoisie, which post-1991 embraced capitalist globalisation and sought to develop strategic ties with Washington.

This pro-imperialist orientation was combined with terrorist attacks in the south that deliberately targeted Sinhalese working people and thereby intensified communalism and politically strengthened the Sinhala supremacist bourgeoisie. In the areas under its control in the island's North and East, the LTTE ruthlessly suppressed the working class and whipped up communal animosity against Muslims.

Because of its struggle to politically arm the working class with a socialist-internationalist program to oppose the war and secure the democratic rights of the Tamils, the LTTE lashed out against the SEP, into which the RCL had been transformed in 1996. In the summer of 1998, the LTTE held three SEP members—Rajendran Sudarshan, Thirugnana Sambandan and Kasinhathan Naguleshwaran—in captivity for 50 days and a fourth, Rasaratnam Rajavale, for 17 days.

Their release without harm was the outcome of a defence campaign by the SEP and International Committee of the Fourth International that rallied support from working people around the world, including notably many diaspora Tamils in Europe, North America, and Australia.

In the early 1990s, the ICFI undertook a critical review of the Marxist movement's attitude toward the national question and in particular the demand "for the right of self-determination." This was part of a reworking of its program impelled by the intensification of the contradiction between the nation-state system and world economy engendered by globalisation; the Stalinists' embrace of capitalist restoration; and the parallel collapse of the trade unions.

This review highlighted several critical issues. First, as the result of its systematic distortion by the Stalinists, Pabloite opportunists and others, "self-determination" had come to be popularly equated with support for separation and the retrograde, anti-Marxist conception that the working class is obliged to support any and every bourgeois separatist movement.

Second, dogmatic repetition of the slogan "for the right of nations to self-determination," was not a substitute for a concrete historical, socio-economic and political analysis of national demands. The manifest failure of the national bourgeoisie in the countries historically oppressed by imperialism to resolve the key democratic tasks had given rise to numerous separatist movements in the "independent states" created through decolonisation in Asia and Africa. These movements sought to exploit the grievances of the masses in order to divide up states along exclusivist ethnic, linguistic and religious lines in the interests of local exploiters.

Similarly, in the Balkans, as they restored capitalism, various Stalinist factions, working in league with Washington and Berlin, were raising the banner of "national self-determination" to secure and expand their wealth and power. "Such movements," explained the ICFI, "have nothing to do with the struggle against imperialism, nor do they embody the democratic aspirations of the masses of oppressed. They serve to divide the working class and divert the class struggle into ethno-communal warfare."

Thirdly, the globalisation of production had provided a socio-economic basis for the proliferation of such national-separatist movements by vastly reducing the significance of national markets and production. Even small territories now had the ability to link up with the world market and potentially provide a lucrative base for the operations of global capital and its local bourgeois agents.

These developments did not take away the urgency of the struggle against national oppression. They only gave further substantiation to the perspective of the Fourth International that, like the other outstanding tasks of the democratic revolution, the eradication of all national oppression and the establishment of genuine equality among peoples and nations is only possible through social revolution led by the working class.

As part of the ICFI's reassessment, the RCL concluded that support for the "right of self-determination for the Tamil people" could only mean in practical political terms support for the national-separatist project of the LTTE and was therefore devoid of any progressive content.

At the same time—through the RCL-SEP's continuous agitation, in the face of state repression, against the Sri Lankan state and its war and for the withdrawal of all security forces from the North and East—all that was genuinely progressive in the self-determination demand was retained and given positive expression.

The RCL and the final stages of the civil war: From phony peace talks to a "war of extermination"

In early 2002, the LTTE entered into peace talks facilitated by the Norwegian government that were backed by the US, Britain and other major powers. The LTTE did so both because it feared intensified strategic isolation under conditions where Washington had invaded Afghanistan in the name of an all-inclusive "war on terror." It also hoped that its offers to become a guarantor of capitalist stability in South Asia would cause the imperialist powers and New Delhi to prod Colombo into making concessions.

The LTTE's aspirations to become a junior partner of imperialist exploitation were epitomised by its incessant claims that an independent Tamil Eelam would become "a Tiger economy." This was an unmistakable reference to the "Asian Tigers" (Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan) which for decades provided US and Japanese capital with cheap labour, while brutally suppressing the working class under autocratic rule.

However, India and the imperialist powers remained adamantly opposed to the creation of an independent Tamil state, calculating it would cut across their interests by encouraging separatist insurgencies across South Asia. Accordingly, the LTTE again shifted gears. In September 2002, it renounced the goal of a separate state, indicating its willingness to accept a share of power within a reorganised, "federal" Sri Lankan capitalist state.

The WSWS explained in a September 2002 editorial board statement that, in abandoning its own program the better to pursue the selfish class aims of the Tamil bourgeoisie, the LTTE was joining "the long line of national liberation movements that have exchanged their combat fatigues for an entrée card into government administration and corporate boardrooms."

The SEP opposed the peace talks, which were hailed by the pseudo-left NSSP, United Socialist Party, and myriad NGOs, warning that they had nothing to do with meeting the democratic aspirations and social needs of the Sri Lankan masses, Tamil or Sinhalese. Any power-sharing deal would be a division of the spoils among rival bourgeois factions, and

aimed at the strengthening capitalist rule across the island. Moreover, explained the SEP, behind the scenes the Sinhalese ruling elite was feverishly preparing to renew the war.

In 2006, after a series of provocations against the Tamil masses and the LTTE, President Mahinda Rajapakse and his SFLP government resumed all-out war with the full backing of the US, India and other imperialist powers.

The LTTE responded by intensifying its appeals to the imperialists and the Indian bourgeoisie. At no time did it make any attempt to rally the workers and toilers of Sri Lanka, India and internationally against the racist war.

The SEP, meanwhile, redoubled its efforts to mobilise the working class against the war, which Colombo now cynically promoted as integral to Bush's "war on terror." In an October 21, 2006 statement indicting Colombo for its brutal military offensive, the SEP Political Committee called on the working class to "initiate its own independent political campaign to rally the rural poor, young people and sections of the middle class to put a stop to war and the profit system, which is the source of militarism and communalism."

The statement called on working people throughout the Indian subcontinent, Asia and internationally to oppose Colombo's violent aggression and to support their class brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka. "The essential basis for unifying the working class against the war and capitalism," the statement insisted, "is intransigent opposition to all forms of nationalism, communalism and racism, including both the Sinhala supremacism of the Colombo politicians and the Tamil separatism of the LTTE."

The war ended in 2009 as it had begun more than a quarter-century before. Only the crimes committed by the Sri Lankan ruling class and its state apparatus were on a vastly greater scale, with tens of thousands of civilians killed in a final bloodbath in April–May 2009.

Pivotal lessons for today

The LTTE's defeat, as the SEP explained in the document adopted at its 2011 founding congress, was "not primarily a military one, but was the product of the inherent weakness of its political perspective ... The only social force in society capable of waging a struggle for genuine democratic rights against the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and its imperialist backers is the working class. However, the LTTE was always organically opposed to any orientation to unite workers—Tamil and Sinhala—on a class basis."

A decade on, none of the underlying issues that led to the civil war have found progressive resolution. The Colombo establishment's much-touted "peace dividend" proved to be a cruel hoax. Security forces continue to occupy the North. The militarised state machine and repressive laws developed during the war remain intact for use against an increasingly rebellious working class.

In the war's aftermath, the Tamil bourgeoisie moved from supporting the LTTE to backing the openly pro-American Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which has become a linchpin of the Colombo political establishment. The TNA is among Washington's most fervent supporters in the Sri Lankan elite. It played an important role in the US regime-change operation that resulted in Rajapakse, whom the US deemed too close to Beijing, being replaced in January 2015 by his longtime henchmen Sirisena. In pursuit of Washington's favour and of self and power in Colombo, the TNA has effectively shelved its demand for any investigation into the horrific war crimes the Sri Lankan state inflicted on the Tamil people.

In the recent struggles against the government's IMF-endorsed austerity measures Sinhalese and Tamil workers have stood side-by-side. This instinctive class unity must be politically leavened by the socialist-internationalist program which has animated the struggle of the RCL-SEP over the past five decades, including under the most trying conditions of civil war and state repression.

Today—under conditions of the breakdown of world capitalism, the resurgence of imperialist violence, and the global turn of capitalist ruling elite's to ultra-right chauvinist and nationalist politics—the RCL-SEP's struggle for socialist internationalism and elaboration, based on the defence and development of Permanent Revolution, of the revolutionary working-class answer to the "Tamil national question," to securing the democratic rights of the Tamil masses, provides pivotal strategic lessons, not just for workers and youth in Sri Lanka and South Asia, but around the world.

The author also recommends:

The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
[26 March 2012]

The SEP and the fight for the Socialist United States of Sri Lanka and Eelam
[1 December 1998]



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