

Chauvinist “We Tamil” party seeks to divide working class in Indian elections

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1 May 2019

In the state of Tamil Nadu, the Naam Thamilar Katchi (NTK, We Tamil Party) has mounted a Tamil-chauvinist campaign in India’s seven-stage parliamentary elections. Amid rising class struggles in India and worldwide, and a growing danger of large-scale war, the NTK relentlessly promotes Tamil nationalism to divide workers and peasants along ethnic lines inside India and subordinate them to imperialism and the Indian state.

Recognising that workers are deeply disillusioned with the policies that India’s two national big business parties, the ruling Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) and the Congress Party, have pursued for decades—along with their allies in Tamil Nadu, the ruling ADMK (Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) and the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)—the NTK tries to block a turn to the left.

With 900,000 graduates unemployed in Tamil Nadu and indebted peasants committing suicide daily across India, NTK leader Sebastian Seeman seeks to whip up hatred against North Indian workers. “We have come to the situation of losing our motherland,” Seeman claims. “They have occupied the capital, Chennai, and all the main cities. ... As one journalist pointed out, as many as 7 million North Indians came to Tamil Nadu. Those who lose power become slaves.”

Seeman has put forward the demand that “Tamils should rule Tamil Nadu,” denouncing state officials who speak other Indian languages such as Malayalam or Telugu.

This reactionary rhetoric stirs up bloody conflicts with workers and oppressed people who have migrated to Tamil Nadu or live in neighbouring Indian states—all of whom face the same problems as workers and toilers who originally hail from Tamil Nadu. It expresses the interests of a narrow, grasping layer of billionaires and millionaires, who exploit ethnic and communal divisions to advance their interests against other sections of the ruling elite and, above all, to divide the working class.

Seeman has promised to make Tamil Nadu the world’s wealthiest state by building a “selfless and loving dictatorship.” In other words, he is proposing to ruthlessly

suppress social opposition so as to provide transnational corporations with a pliant cheap-labour workforce in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) set up by the DMK and ADMK.

The main target of this nationalistic and authoritarian rhetoric is the upsurge of the international working class. Since the beginning of 2019, teachers, transport workers, government employees, and SEZ workers have launched strikes across India, as well as workers in Sri Lanka, including Tamil-speaking plantation workers. This takes place amid mass strikes also by US teachers, “Yellow Vest” protests in France, and mass protests against the Algerian and Sudanese regimes.

While whipping up Tamil chauvinism to divide the workers, Seeman also backs the Indian government’s war policies and its alliance with US imperialism to isolate China. While stressing that “India is the union of many nations,” Seeman said he could support “three tasks for the central state including money printing, the security of the country and foreign affairs department.”

Seeman has remained deafeningly silent on the Indian government’s “global strategic partnership” with Washington, which is aimed at building up India as a counterweight to China, and has supported the Indian army in its historic enmity with Pakistan, China’s main regional ally. After bomb blasts at Pulwama in Indian-held Kashmir this February nearly led to all-out war between nuclear-armed Pakistan and India, Seeman attacked the BJP government. However, he did not criticise the BJP’s reckless and provocative bombing of Pakistan, but its “negligence and administrative disruption” that “put in danger many soldiers’ lives.”

In other speeches, Seeman has pledged that if he takes power, he will send the Indian navy to protect Tamil Nadu fishermen from the Sri Lankan navy. Such demagogic speeches only stoke tensions and pave the way for another disastrous Indian military intervention in Sri Lanka, as in 1987.

The NTK can only win a hearing due to the decades-long,

reactionary record of the Congress Party and the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM). The CPI and CPM endorsed the Stalinist bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union in 1991, as the Congress Party integrated India into the world capitalist economy as a cheap labour source with Stalinist support. Since then, they have pursued policies of austerity and militarism that opened a path for reactionary demagogues like Seeman to mask his right-wing programme behind chauvinist populism.

Seeman specialises in trying to give his politics a popular veneer by exploiting deeply felt concerns in Tamil Nadu for the suppression of the democratic rights of Sri Lanka's Tamil minority.

Seeman's campaign appearances featured pictures of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the murdered leader of the Tamil separatist LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), killed by the Sri Lankan military in May 2009 at the end of the 26-year Sri Lankan civil war. Summarising his nationalist perspective, Prabhakaran said, "For me, the father should be he who gave me life. My leader should be a blood relation. This is our position. Our ideological thirst will be overcome only when we realise a separate Tamil country in this broadly extended globe for our Tamil nation."

In fact, the LTTE's policy of building a separate Tamil state in northern Sri Lanka ended in disaster. Having lost popular support in the parts of northern Sri Lanka that it held, the LTTE was massacred in 2009 in a barbaric Sri Lankan army slaughter that claimed the lives of over 40,000 civilians as well as the LTTE's top leadership. A bourgeois movement, the LTTE was organically incapable of appealing to workers in Sri Lanka, India and internationally to come to the defence of the Tamil people in opposing the discriminatory laws and repression of the Sri Lankan state.

Instead, the LTTE long oriented to securing the support of the Indian bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers. As its end drew near, the LTTE desperately appealed for aid from the governments of the United States, the major European powers and India. All of these powers, however, including India, turned a cold shoulder and lined up behind the Sri Lankan regime's massacre of the LTTE.

Seeman's pretence of defending Sri Lankan Tamils is a political fraud. His We Tamil Party was founded on May 18, 2010, on the first anniversary of the LTTE's defeat. It intervened in the 2011 Tamil Nadu assembly elections, calling for the defeat of the DMK-Congress alliance, which was in power and had extended support to the Sri Lankan regime's communal war.

Seeman, however, ended up backing the alliance between the ADMK and the Hindu-supremacist BJP, whose Sri Lanka policy was just as reactionary as that of the DMK-

Congress. Indeed, on July 7, 2010, ADMK leader J. Jayalalithaa told the Tamil paper *Dinamalar*: "It is true that I said during the war the killings of civilians were inevitable. Even today I didn't condemn the elimination of the LTTE in the war." Seeman was supporting Jayalalithaa—who as Tamil Nadu chief minister had infamously sacked 170,000 state workers for striking in 2003—when this statement was published.

Seeman's bellicose threats against Sri Lanka flow from the inability of the bourgeoisie to resolve any of the democratic questions posed in the region. For the Indian Tamil nationalists, fearing above all an international mobilisation of the working class against capitalism, the only mechanism to intervene in Sri Lanka is through the threat of military invasion and an ethnic war.

The working class has already had bitter experience of such interventions. From July 1987 to 1990, thousands of Tamil civilians were killed when New Delhi, having previously used the LTTE and other Tamil nationalist groups to pressure Colombo, changed course and dispatched India's military to occupy the Tamil-majority North and East of Sri Lanka. During this period, as the Sri Lankan military also occupied parts of that region, it was turned against Sinhalese workers and rural toilers in the south. More than 60,000 Sinhalese youth were massacred by the Colombo regime.

The key question is the international unification of the working class in struggle, including workers of all ethnicities in India and Sri Lanka. History has time and again vindicated Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. The struggle to establish democratic rights and overcome the national and ethnic divisions in the region can only be waged as a revolutionary struggle of the international working class for socialism, drawing behind it the urban and rural poor.



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