

TamilNet stokes ethnic divisions as Sri Lankan regime plans dictatorship

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19 August 2020

The landslide victory of Sri Lankan President Gotabhaya Rajapakse's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) has exposed the bankruptcy of Tamil nationalism. It has not only suffered an electoral defeat. It has neither a perspective nor the intention of opposing the Rajapakse cabal's plans to set up a military-backed presidential dictatorship amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

TamilNet, an English-language web site writing to the international Tamil diaspora, responded with an article titled "2020 election resembles 1970 polls that formed genocidal Sri Lanka." Amid growing strikes and struggles mobilizing Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers together in Sri Lanka, it stirs up communalism, promoting the Tamil National Alliance's (TNA) political periphery and support for US war threats against China in the Indian Ocean region.

TamilNet points to the collapse of the two main bourgeois parties, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP), which ruled Sri Lanka since independence and waged the 1983-2009 anti-Tamil civil war. Now, it states, "the SLFP is replaced by the SLPP, ten years after genocidal annihilation of the armed movement and the de-facto state of Tamil Eelam. The SLPP is poised to enact a constitutional discourse emboldening the unitary state towards the final phase of heritage and structural genocide in the occupied country of Eelam Tamils."

The Rajapakse regime is a threat to workers of all ethnic and religious backgrounds in Sri Lanka. Moreover, a long and bitter history shows that during great political crises, the Sri Lankan ruling class inevitably turns to inciting violent ethno-sectarian conflict. But TamilNet, which speaks for Tamil bourgeois forces complicit in incitement of communal tensions, has nothing to offer to combat Rajapakse's accelerating drive towards dictatorship.

Speaking nostalgically about the growth of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka during the 1970s, it promotes the

turn to separatism and armed struggle before the civil war: "Back then, the younger generation realised the reality that even God couldn't help Tamils. The only way left was resistance, and that enabled them to challenge the genocidal state for three decades effectively."

Today, TamilNet holds up TNA split-offs like the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) and Tamil National People's Alliance (TMTK) as the alternative to the TNA's collapse. It writes, "Eelam Tamil voters have placed an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam of the TNPF and Justice CV Wigneswaran of the TMTK." TamilNet tasks them with "course-correcting" what TamilNet calls the "Quisling politics of R. Sampanthan and M.A. Sumanthiran," who lead the TNA.

TamilNet's claim that Sri Lankan Tamils are flocking around the TNPF and TMTK is a fraud. Neither group won broad support. While the TNA collapsed from 16 to 10 parliamentary seats, they received 67,766 votes (0.58 percent, 2 seats) and 51,301 votes (0.44 percent, 1 seat) respectively. In the North and East of Sri Lanka, Tamil voters also gave support to the SLFP (49,373 votes in the Jaffna district) and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP, 61,464 votes) a paramilitary group that works closely with the Rajapakse regime.

If TamilNet feels compelled to compare the TNA leadership to Vidkun Quisling, the Nazi-collaborationist dictator of German-occupied Norway shot for treason after World War II, this is because the TNA is deeply discredited among workers and youth. This is why some voters, in disgust, even cast ballots for the SLFP and the EPDP, which are widely despised in the Tamil community.

The TNA backed the US-led regime change campaign to oust Mahinda Rajapakse in 2015 and install Maithripala Sirisena as president in 2015 to cut Rajapakse's economic links to China. It promised that

Sirisena would deliver “good governance,” free Tamil political prisoners held since the end of the war, and end military occupation of land in northern Sri Lanka. All these promises proved to be lies.

The Tamil nationalists supported Sirisena’s drastic austerity IMF policies and anti-democratic measures, which provoked strikes and protests of workers and youth across Sri Lanka. While they were rewarded with state posts, including the position of leaders of the official opposition, Tamil political prisoners kept rotting in jail and the army continued occupying the land. The TNA and the TNPF went so far as to support the Sirisena regime by quietly flying their own members out of the country, once it emerged the regime had tortured them.

The TNPF and the TMTK are TNA split-offs who broke with the TNA to avoid being discredited by its record, but who similarly orient to the US war drive against China. The TNPF, which backed the 2015 regime change operation, argues this position in its 2020 election manifesto.

The manifesto asserts, “Sri Lanka is an important point in the political competition in the Indian Ocean. This geopolitical rivalry has had many impacts on various stages of the journey of our race towards emancipation. ... This continuing geopolitical rivalry is also providing opportunities for the Tamil people to achieve their goals. The Tamil National People's Front continues its journey with the logically firm belief that our goal can be achieved by approaching these opportunities in the interest of the Tamil people, with dedication and creativity.”

TamilNet’s empty references to the 1970s are simply political cover for this same pro-imperialist orientation. It cynically calls on Tamil workers in Sri Lanka and worldwide to adopt the political strategy and orientation of those it has just denounced as Quislings.

Asserting that “only Geopolitics can help Tamils,” TamilNet writes: “The key to future success lies in realising that only a new form of resistance with an international dimension could effectively challenge the genocidal state and the geopolitical abettors of ‘development’ crimes. The Tamil diaspora and global Tamils also have a historical duty in this regard.”

TamilNet’s meaning is more or less clear. They do not have an organization to wage war against the Sri Lankan state since the crushing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at the end of the civil war, and they support another war instead. They are asking the Tamil diaspora to give political and financial support to the

TNPF and TMTK and to help promote these parties in Washington and the European capitals and so strengthen the Tamil nationalist parties’ positions in Colombo. This is bankrupt.

US and European imperialism wage politically criminal wars across the world, killing untold thousands of people, while carrying out deep attacks against the working class at home. Tamils have a long, bitter experience of the bankruptcy of appeals to them to defend human rights. It was the decision of Washington and the European powers to stand aside and give Colombo the green light for a final assault in 2009, at the end of the war, that led to the massacre of tens of thousands of disarmed Tamil fighters and civilians at Mullaitivu.

The way forward against the danger of military-police dictatorship in Sri Lanka and internationally is the turn to the working class. TamilNet whips up communalism to divide workers along ethnic lines, paving the way for the SLPP regime to imposing sweeping austerity and a militarized presidential dictatorship. The Socialist Equality Party, which has an unbroken record of defending Tamils’ democratic rights, fights to unify the working class across ethnic lines.

The alternative to the bloody record of the Sri Lankan unitary state, established under the imperialist-brokered settlement at the end of direct British rule over India in 1947-1948, is not empty propaganda for national self-determination by pro-imperialist reactionaries. It is a struggle by the working class for power, and the SEP’s perspective of building a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the United Socialist States of South Asia. The SEP deserves the support of workers in Sri Lanka, the diaspora and beyond.



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