

Tamil National Alliance in deep crisis after Sri Lankan election collapse

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The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the Tamil bourgeoisie's main party in Sri Lanka, obtained only 10 seats in the August 5 general elections, down from 16 in the last parliament. Its overall vote fell to 327,168, a sharp drop from the 515,963 votes it received in the 2015 elections.

The TNA is a coalition of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and Peoples' Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). ITAK is the TNA's leading party.

In the elections, ITAK leader and former parliamentarian Mavai Senadhirajah and its secretary, former Eastern Provincial Council member K. Thurairajasigham, were defeated. Other leaders are now seeking to grab the top party posts. To avert a further split, proposals have been made to appoint TELO and PLOTE leaders as TNA spokesman and organiser, respectively, ousting the current officials.

Whatever patch-ups are made will not resolve the crisis erupting in the TNA. This is an expression of the bankruptcy not only of the TNA, but the entire Tamil bourgeois-nationalist perspective.

In the November 2019 presidential election, the TNA promoted Sajith Premadasa, the right-wing United National Party (UNP) candidate, as a "lesser evil" against Gotabhaya Rajapakse, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) nominee.

Rajapakse is hated among Tamil workers and poor. As defence secretary under former President Mahinda Rajapakse, he presided over the final years of the bloody war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The Sri Lankan army ended the war in May 2009, crushing the LTTE by killing at least 40,000 civilians, according to the UN, and committing many further crimes.

After Rajapakse won the presidential election, the TNA made an abrupt turn and declared its willingness to support his government if it agreed to make a "constitutional change that would fulfil political aspirations of the Tamil people." TNA leader R. Sambandan said that the party "must have a connection to those in power" in Colombo.

This turn to an official responsible for war crimes further

fuelled popular anger against this party.

The TNA's sharp rightward shift since the LTTE's defeat in 2009 is undeniable. After many rounds of talks with Mahinda Rajapakse's government, it turned openly to seek US support for a "political deal" with Colombo while serving US imperialism's geopolitical interests. While strengthening military and strategic relations with India, Washington was turning sharply against China.

Washington and New Delhi both supported Mahinda Rajapakse's war against the LTTE and his anti-democratic rule. However, both were hostile to his growing relations with Beijing to obtain military hardware and investment. Washington wanted to bring Sri Lanka, strategically located in the Indian Ocean, under its sway.

In the 2015 Sri Lankan presidential election, Washington covertly orchestrated a regime change operation to oust Mahinda Rajapakse, replacing him with Maithripala Sirisena. The TNA, together with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the pseudo-left groups, fully backed the operation. They cynically claimed Sirisena would bring "good governance" and improve living and social conditions.

The TNA promised the new government would investigate human rights violations and rectify the social devastation caused by the war. It became a de-facto partner of the coalition government led by Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Washington had no interest in TNA demands for power-sharing, however, but wanted the TNA to stabilise the Colombo regime, which it saw as favourable to its geopolitical interests.

The TNA has obediently followed US demands throughout the past five years. Sambandan and Sumanthiran helped the Colombo regime suppress war crime investigations, block demands to free Tamil political prisoners, prevent the release of lands occupied by the military, and deny justice in disappeared persons' cases.

Moreover, the TNA collaborated with the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe regime's austerity programme dictated by

the International Monetary Fund (IMF) despite continuous resistance from the workers and poor. Especially starting in 2018, united strikes and protests of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers erupted amid an international upsurge of class struggles. This ultimately brought down the “unity government” in Colombo, further discrediting the TNA in the eyes of Tamil workers and poor.

This election saw the collapse of the traditional capitalist parties that had alternately governed the country since formal independence in 1948—Wickremesinghe’s UNP and Sirisena’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

Like their counterparts in Colombo, the Tamil nationalist parties fear seething the social anger among workers and poor as big business and the state intensify attacks on social rights amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. President Rajapakse is rapidly moving towards military dictatorship against the working class.

The bourgeois parties are united in their fear and enmity of the working class. This also underlies the TNA’s approach to Rajapakse. Significantly, all the Tamil MPs joined their counterparts in the parliament last Friday to approve the president’s policy speech without a vote.

Responsibility for continuing communal discrimination and bloodshed against the Tamil minority, which is historically rooted in the colonial oppression of the island by imperialism, lies mainly with the Colombo elite. The Tamil bourgeois parties backed it with their own nationalist politics, however, creating one disaster after another for Tamil workers and poor. Over more than seven decades of existence, ITAK (the Federal Party), formed in a 1949 break-away from the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), played the leading role in this.

The ACTC, then a partner of the UNP government, supported its 1948 Citizenship Act, which abolished basic democratic rights of Indian-origin Tamil plantation workers, launching communal discrimination to divide the working class. Since then, ITAK has posed as a champion of Tamil nationalism while Colombo regimes intensified anti-Tamil campaigns.

The great betrayal by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) of the principles of socialist internationalism, by entering in 1964 into the bourgeois coalition government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, which was based on Sinhala-Buddhist supremacism, strengthened the Tamil nationalist party. In the ensuing years, this paved the way for the emergence of Tamil militant groups, including the separatist LTTE in the 1970s.

Moreover, the 1972 constitution gave priority to Buddhism and to Sinhala as the official language. The architect of this constitution was LSSP leader Colvin R. de Silva, a minister of the SLFP-led coalition government.

In response, ITAK united with the ACTC in 1972 to form the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). In 1976, its conference at Vaddukoddai, near Jaffna, passed a resolution reiterating self-determination and calling for an independent separate “secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam” for the north and east.

ITAK and other Tamil parties used Tamil nationalism to divide workers along ethnic lines. This only helped the Colombo elite and chauvinist groups’ Sinhala-communist provocations that culminated in the three-decade civil war, which began in 1983.

Today, ITAK, TULF, the LTTE remnants and the TNA, which was formed in 2001, all have a similar line: to bargain with the Colombo elite for greater power with backing from New Delhi and Washington, while ultimately conforming to US interests. This is the reactionary dead end of Tamil nationalism.

The political struggle against the LSSP’s Great Betrayal and against Tamil nationalism waged by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) since its inception in 1968, is well documented. Our struggle is based on the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution. Democratic rights in countries of belated capitalist development can be secured only by a united struggle of the working class for socialist revolution on an international scale.

The SEP fights for the internationalist unity of the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers, demands the withdrawal of Sri Lankan forces from the north and east, and opposes dictatorship, war and inequality based on a socialist program. Its perspective is for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic as part of the Union of the Socialist Republics of South Asia and internationally. We urge Tamil working people and youth to study the unrelenting fight of the SEP and join and build this party.



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