

Tamil National People's Front collaborates with allies of Sri Lankan regime

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9 February 2021

After two local councils' proposed budgets were defeated in northern Sri Lanka, the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF), a Tamil nationalist party, joined the pro-government Eelam People Democratic Party (EPDP) to take over in those councils on December 30, 2020.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which governed Jaffna Municipal Council and Nallur local government, was defeated in the vote on its 2021 budget proposals. After this, Manivannan, the TNPF national organizer who was sacked from the party, became mayor with the support of TNPF and EPDP municipal councilors.

Similarly, one of Manivannan's supporters contested for the chairmanship of the Nallur local government and became council chairman with EPDP support. The TNPF and EPDP thus allied to oust two widely discredited TNA local governments. However, this was only as part of an effort to tie the working class and youth to reactionary political allies of the regime in Colombo.

EPDP leader Douglas Devananda is a minister in President Gotabhaya Rajapakse's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) government. The EPDP not only was a partner in several previous Colombo governments, but is notorious for being Colombo's long-time partner in the communal 1983–2009 Sri Lankan civil war. It functioned as a paramilitary ally of the Sri Lankan and Indian militaries between 1987 and 1990, during the Indian intervention in the conflict.

The collaboration with the EPDP of the TNPF, led by Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, is another political exposure of the TNPF's nationalist politics. This maneuver strengthens the government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse, which is moving towards a military dictatorship.

To escape criticism, Ponnambalam cynically declared he would expel the 13 members who aligned with the EPDP and Manivannan in both local governments. This is rank hypocrisy, however. Though Ponnambalam has often denounced the EPDP as a "parasite group" in order to pretend that he pursues a separate policy, he has previously proposed alliance with EPDP to take over local councils.

The above events are another expression of the political bankruptcy of all the Tamil nationalist bourgeois parties and their move to the right. This has intensified the internal factional fights of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK) that leads the TNA, and the TNPF, which postures as an alternative to the TNA.

Under the leadership of Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, the TNPF was formed by the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), which is made up of forces expelled from the TNA in 2010. The TNA, for its part, was formed to cooperate with US-backed attempts by a faction of the Colombo bourgeoisie, led by the United National Party, to organize peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) during the communal war.

After the Sri Lankan army massacred tens of thousands of Tamil civilians and crushed the LTTE in May 2009, the TNA, led by R. Sampanthan, sought an alliance with the Colombo establishment. In 2010, it supported presidential candidate General Sarath Fonseka, who had commanded the offensive against the LTTE launched by Rajapakse in 2009.

The TNPF was formed by forces that feared the TNA would be politically discredited by its attempts to ally with parties who oversaw the communal massacre in 2009. Ponnambalam led the founding of the TNPF, trying to present it as the true defenders of bankrupt Tamil nationalism. There was, however, no fundamental political difference between the TNPF and the TNA. Like the separatist LTTE itself, both sought to secure the privileges of the Tamil bourgeoisie, by working out an alliance with the imperialist powers and the most powerful regional power, India.

Shortly after the TNPF was formed in 2010, Ponnambalam told the media that he was pursuing the TNA's founding policies. "The founding principles of the TNA are the right to self-determination, sovereignty and the motherland. We are working hand in hand and friendly with India and the international community to achieve them," he said, adding, "The international community is pressuring the Rajapakse government, and we should use it."

The TNA was at the forefront of the Tamil nationalist parties in supporting US President Barack Obama's "Pivot to Asia" policy. This extended up to the US-led regime change operation that ousted Rajapakse from power in the January 2015 presidential election and installed Maithripala Sirisena. The TNA became a leading defender of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe "good governance" government, emerging as an aid for Washington's war drive against China.

The TNA was politically shattered, however, by the historic political crisis in the last presidential elections, that came amid an upsurge of strikes and protests by Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim workers and youth against austerity and police-state policies. The Sinhalese bourgeoisie's traditional parties, the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which had ruled the country since formal independence in 1947, collapsed.

The TNA backed United People Power candidate Sajith Premadasa, who sought a compromise with Gotabaya Rajapakse after the latter became president. Meeting with his brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, the TNA backed "herd immunity" policies in the pandemic.

The TNPF continues the TNA's politics with at most a few tactical changes. In the 2015 elections, it called to abstain from voting for Sirisena—not because of US geopolitical strategy, but to posture as an opponent of the Colombo regime. Ponnambalam also called for an election boycott in the 2019 presidential election.

However, Ponnambalam and other Tamil nationalist parties are also aligned with the war strategy of the United States and its South Asian strategic partner, India, against China.

The crisis of these parties has erupted within the TNA, as factions led by Sumanthiran and Senathirajah blamed each other for the severe setbacks in the August general elections. In the 2015 election, the TNA received 515,963 votes or 4.62 percent of the country's total vote, but it received only 327,168 or 2.8 percent in the last election. The number of seats won in 2015 dropped to 10 in 2019. Its sharp setback shows the growing discontent among Tamil workers and the poor with the TNA.

The ITAK, traditionally regarded as the Tamil bourgeoisie's main party, and which led the TNA, has split over the past few years.

In the last election, though the Tamil People's Alliance led by former Northern Provincial Council Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran and the TNPF each won one seat, they are still unpopular. These parties' occasional statements about those killed during the war, the disappeared, political prisoners and the disasters caused by the war, are only cynical attempts to quell growing mass anger against the

government.

As the crisis of global capitalism intensified with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tamil parties and the bourgeois parties in the south are exposed among workers and the poor.

Experience has shown time and again that the Tamil nationalist parties do not fight for the democratic rights of the Tamil people, but are conspiring with the capitalist regime in Colombo in the interests of the Tamil bourgeoisie, against the entire working class and poor of the island. In order to defend their privileges, they have turned themselves into outfits defending the global war strategy pursued by US imperialism.

In the context of the rapid spread of the coronavirus in Sri Lanka, the Tamil parties fully support the government's move to force workers back to work and reopen schools to protect the profits of big business.

President Rajapakse's regime is accelerating its efforts to suppress growing workers' struggles, incite anti-Tamil and anti-Muslim violence and resort to military dictatorship. The government seeks to divide the working class along racial lines. Similarly, the Tamil parties' nationalist propaganda only serves to divide workers in the north and east from their class brothers in the south.

Tamil workers, the poor and youth must reject Tamil nationalism and the bourgeois parties that promote Tamil nationalism. The abolition of racial discrimination against the Tamil people and the defense of their democratic rights is bound up with the struggle to overthrow of the pro-imperialist bourgeois regime and fight for socialism.

The program before workers and youth is to ensure the internationalist unity of Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers and to fight for the Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.



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