Sri Lankan Tamil nationalists seek alliance with India's Hindu-chauvinist BJP

V. Gnana
3 March 2021

As the COVID-19 death toll mounts, Tamil nationalist parties in Sri Lanka are appealing to India's ruling Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This comes amid growing war tensions driven above all by US imperialism. The incoming Biden administration, which recently bombed Iranian-linked militias in Syria, is also threatening China, intensifying tensions across the Indian Ocean region between China and Washington's main regional ally, India.

The class content of Tamil nationalist appeals to the BJP is virtually self-evident. The BJP is a violently anticommunist party with a long, bloody tradition of inciting communal massacres of Muslims. It has adopted the "herd immunity" policies championed by US imperialism on the pandemic, as well as allying with Washington against China. By appealing to the BJP, the Tamil nationalists are seeking virulently right-wing alliances to pursue "herd immunity" policies, whip up communal hatred and back imperialist war policies against working class opposition.

They are responding to the February 15 comments from BJP Chief Minister of Tripura state Biplab Deb, who said that Home Minister Amit Shah wanted the BJP to take over Sri Lanka. "We have to expand the party in Sri Lanka, Nepal and win there to form a government," Deb quoted Shah as saying. Deb also attacked the Chinese Communist Party, "The communists claimed that their party was the world's largest party. But Amit Shah made the BJP the largest party in the world."

Maravanpulavu Sachchidanandan, who leads Sri Lanka's Hindu-extremist Shiva Senai, soon endorsed Deb's remarks. Calling the BJP "the safest movement for Hindus in the South Asian region," he hailed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a global protector of Hindus, calling for the building of the BJP in Sri Lanka. "Only such a movement and leaders like Modi and [Indian Interior Ministry] Amit Shah can resolve the problems of the Hindus in Sri Lanka. This is why we have decided to start the BJP here."

This is a provocative, barely veiled threat of violence against the working class. The BJP has sought to violently repress mounting strikes and farmers protests against its austerity agenda and also mass protests that erupted before the pandemic against its anti-Muslim citizenship law. Moreover, the Indian state has already invaded and occupied much of the Tamil-majority north of Sri Lanka between 1987 to1990.

Nonetheless, several prominent Tamil nationalist politicians in Sri Lanka have supported Deb. Tamil National Party leader K. Shivajilingam, who joined an east-to-north march in Sri Lanka led by Hindu clerics last month, endorsed the call of the Hindu fanatics, saying, "There are communist parties all over the world. In that case, why should there not be another international in the name of the BJP?"

He denounced the Sri Lankan government's decision to award a Chinese company a contract to generate electricity and solar power on three small islands off Sri Lanka's northern coast. "The Eelam Tamils will never permit Chinese companies on this soil," Shivajilingam said, adding, "This [Chinese contract] must be immediately withdrawn. If not, we the Tamil people will take things into our own hands; that the government must understand."

Shivajilingam threatened that if the Sri Lankan government did not toe an anti-China line, US and Indian troops could invade Sri Lanka. "In the Indo-Pacific region, if you were to act against India and the United States, certainly there would be a major conflict. … There is no guarantee that perhaps American or Indian troops might not land and stay in the North and East" of Sri Lanka.

He threatened to back an ethnic partition of Sri Lanka, with India annexing the Tamil Eelam state. "Understand

© World Socialist Web Site

that many countries in the world are broken and fragmented. If you want, the island of Sri Lanka would be divided into two parts, one for the state of Tamil Eelam and another for the state of Sri Lanka. Understand that the Chief Minister would be elected, and everyone would have to go to [India's] New Delhi Parliament and Upper House."

Addressing the Modi government, he pledged, "You must seek your security. We, the Eelam Tamils, will stand by it."

Other Tamil nationalists endorsed founding the BJP in Sri Lanka, speculating that it could help their maneuvers with the Sri Lankan government in Colombo. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) official S. Shritharan said he would "welcome" the BJP into Sri Lanka if it supported ethnic Tamil control of the North and East. He added that "the Sinhala nation must accept the art, culture, autonomy, sovereignty, Tamil nationalism and language of the Tamil people."

Such remarks expose the violent shift to the right by the Tamil nationalists amid the pandemic and mounting geostrategic tensions in the region. Since the defeat and massacre of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighters at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009, Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim workers and youths have increasingly mobilized together in strikes and protests against austerity and police-state policies. This staggered and terrified Sri Lanka's Sinhalese and Tamil bourgeois parties, cutting across their nationalist politics.

While the Tamil bourgeois nationalists reacted in fear of the movement from below, they pursued an ever more openly neo-colonial, communal strategy. In 2015, they supported the US-backed regime change operation in Colombo to oust then-President Mahinda Rajapakse, whom Washington saw as too close to China, and set up a US-backed, pro-austerity government. After it collapsed in 2019, however, and the Rajapakse brothers returned to power, the Tamil nationalists became ever more hysterical in their right-wing, anti-China rhetoric.

The pandemic has brought these conflicts to unprecedented intensity. The Modi government has been shaken by the mass strikes by public sector workers and protests by farmers. Now, as infections and deaths again mount across South Asia, all factions of the bourgeoisie are pursuing a murderous "herd immunity" policy, provoking bitter opposition among workers and youth.

There are signs that Tamil nationalists' pro-BJP rhetoric may have gone too far, from the standpoint of Washington and New Delhi. On February 24, US Ambassador to Sri Lanka Alaina Teplitz met with TNA officials Mavi Senadhirasa, S. Sritharan, and C.V.K. Sivagnanam. She also met Jaffna Mayor V. Manivannan of the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF). Manivannan reportedly hailed Vice President Kamala Harris for her Tamil ancestry and appealed for US assistance. After these meetings, several of their online videos of the Hindu east-to-north march were taken down.

The Tamil nationalists' endorsements of the BJP are nonetheless a warning to workers in Sri Lanka and internationally. The workers and toiling masses do not and cannot forget the horrific trail of blood and pillage left behind by the Indian army in 1987-90 in areas of Sri Lanka it occupied, but the Tamil nationalists are seeking allies in New Delhi. However, the bourgeois nationalists are pressing on to the right, as international class and geopolitical tensions reach explosive dimensions.

It is three decades since the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka and the Stalinist regime's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, the Indian bourgeoisie and the Tamil nationalist parties have fully integrated themselves into the imperialist-dominated world capitalist market and shifted far to the right. The Tamil nationalists' anti-China outbursts, aiming to curry favor with US imperialism and Modi, are inseparable from their bitter hostility to the working class.

By appealing to Modi, they seek allies against a renewed upsurge of workers struggles, notably in Sri Lanka—with strikes by tea plantation workers, health care workers protests against the disastrous pandemic response and mass protests across the North and East in September.

The alternative to the reactionary politics of the Sri Lankan and Indian regimes and to their Tamil nationalist allies is advanced by the Socialist Equality Party. It counterposes to the plots of New Delhi, Colombo and the Tamil nationalists the international mobilization and unification of the working class, across all the region's ethnic and state boundaries, in a struggle for state power and for socialism. It is the only way to halt the imperialist war drive and impose a scientifically-based policy to stop the pandemic.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site