

We Tamil Party tries to divide Indian auto workers along ethnic lines

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Senthamizhan Seeman, the chief coordinator of the Tamil-nationalist Naam Tamil Party (NTK, “We Tamil” Party), is shedding crocodile tears as COVID-19 rips across India.

This is his response to mounting strikes and protests in auto plants across India, as anger mounts among workers forced to work continuously without any safety measures in place. Dozens of autoworkers have died of COVID-19 so far, and infections are spreading rapidly. Ford, Hyundai, Renault-Nissan, Wipro, Eicher Motors, India Yamaha Motor and Royal Enfield were forced to close temporarily due to strikes or protests.

Suddenly, fourteen months after the pandemic began, Seeman is turning 180 degrees and making empty calls for social distancing policies in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. He said, “non-essential factories should be temporarily banned from operating in the current and precarious situation where workers are highly susceptible to corona infection.” Realizing that workers’ anger was out of control, he sighed: “It is shocking that non-essential factories have been allowed to continue to operate and that workers are becoming more infected as a result.”

Strict adherence to scientific policies to halt the spread of the COVID-19 virus is essential. These include the closure of non-essential workplaces, the closure of schools and the provision of emergency financial support to help people survive until the crisis is over. However, the strongest warnings must be made against the NTK, which promotes communal politics to divide the workers along ethnic lines and block a unified movement of the working class to impose the necessary health and safety measures.

While Seeman poses today as concerned by the fate of factory workers, he has followed the “herd immunity” policies of India’s Hindu-supremacist

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government and the Tamil-nationalist Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Tamil Nadu state government. These have led to a rapid spread of COVID-19 in major industrial and commercial centers of Tamil Nadu, including the capital, Chennai, Coimbatore, Chengalpattu, Tiruvallur, Kanchipuram, Tiruppur, Erode, Salem, Trichy, Thanjavur and Madurai.

Before the April 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly election, the NTK did not follow any social distancing rules for its campaign meetings. Instead, it held rallies with thousands of people, ignoring the surge of the virus that was underway. Indeed, this is one of the reasons for the accelerating spread of the pandemic in Tamil Nadu.

In these elections, the NTK came in third with 3,108,906 votes (6.1 percent). It overtook the Stalinist Communist Party of India with 504,537 votes (1.09 percent) and Communist Party of India-Marxist (390,455 votes, 0.84 percent), as well as India’s traditional ruling Congress Party (1,976,527 votes, 4.28 percent). The Stalinists are in coalition with the ruling DMK.

Amid the discrediting of the Congress and the Stalinist parties and their trade unions, after decades of pro-imperialist and anti-working class policies while in power, the NTK cuts across the building of an alternative movement in the working class with divisive ethnic-nationalist rhetoric.

Since the NTK’s formation in 2010, the racist, anti-working class rhetoric of Seeman and other NTK party leaders has become notorious. Seeman publicly declared: “Tamil Nadu is in danger because millions of other states peoples have infiltrated Tamil Nadu and occupied the entire economic life of Tamils through economic exploitation.”

Seeman advances racist arguments that only ethnic Tamils can govern Tamil Nadu, and that Tamils' jobs are being stolen by workers of other ethnicities. Asserting that "My people need power. Tamils should rule Tamil Nadu," Seeman has asserted that ethnic Tamil rule would guarantee that "selfless, loving dictatorial and corruption-free government" would emerge in Tamil Nadu. He called for the "modernization of the police force" in Tamil Nadu, which is notorious history for attacking democratic rights.

At the same time, Seeman promotes not only police forces that attack the working class, but far-right political organizations. He supported and campaigned for the BJP's alliance with the Hindu-extremist Shiv Sena in the 2012 municipal elections in Mumbai's Dharavi area. The Shiv Sena is notorious for its bloody attacks on Muslims.

When he was challenged publicly about his alliance with far-right forces, Seeman could not deny it, but instead stumbled and replied: "BJP candidate Tamil Selvan belongs to our Pudukottai area [referring to one of the districts of Tamil Nadu]. Supporters of Sri Lankan Tamil Eelam Liberation are a bulwark for the [Tamil] people there."

That is, Seeman and the NTK replied to the exposure of their alliance with violent communalist elements by cynically seeking to exploit the sympathy of workers in Tamil Nadu and the Tamil diaspora for the 2009 communal massacre of Sri Lankan Tamils by the Sri Lankan army. However horrific the crime committed by the Sri Lankan army at the end of the communal war in 2009, which was a massacre of over 40,000 people, it does not change the fact that Seeman is promoting forces who also advance anti-worker, communalist politics.

Last year, during the previous All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) government in Tamil Nadu, the people of the Sathyavani Muthunagar slum in Chennai were forcibly evicted. Seeman responded to this brutal attack on the city's oppressed people by seeking to divert anger along national lines, against workers of other ethnicities in India: "People from other states in Chennai can get permanent residency without any hindrance and live safely in the main areas of the city with all the amenities. But the ancient Tamil settlers do not have

this facility."

While he suddenly is cynically posturing as concerned for Tamil auto workers, Seeman had said nothing up until now in the pandemic about workers opposition to exploitation, temp work, or to being kept on the job in non-essential work, thus helping spread the virus.

Instead, Seeman again tried to appeal to ethnic hatreds, this time by vomiting up the right-wing conspiracy theory about the coronavirus peddled by US imperialism against China, calling the pandemic a "bio war" launched by China. He thus made clear to Washington, which is seeking to make India a front-line military ally against China, the type of pro-imperialist, pro-investor policies he would pursue if he came to power.

The pandemic is a global crisis, driven by a virus that ignores passports and borders, and that can only be resolved by an international struggle of the working class for a rational, scientific policy. The strikes and protests of Indian workers that have led to temporary plant shut-downs have again shown the power of the working class. However, this power can be mobilized only in a conscious struggle to unify workers in India, across all ethnic lines, with their class brothers and sisters in China, America and beyond.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has advanced the call to build International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, around which workers can organize and mobilize in a struggle to defend lives against corporate profits. Seeman's appeals to ethnic hatreds cuts across such a movement, subordinating working class to existing Stalinist organizations and the bankrupt nation-state system. They must be rejected as the work of an enemy of the workers and oppressed people.



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