

Tamil nationalist parties fawn over new Sri Lankan president

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The Tamil nationalist parties based in the North and East of Sri Lanka did not support Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who won last month's presidential election. However, in the wake of the election, all these parties have made congratulatory statements to the new president, whose Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is deeply mired in anti-Tamil chauvinism.

The various disparate Tamil parties adopted different tactics during the election campaign, but all of them aimed at positioning themselves to wheel and deal with the next Colombo government.

None of them has the slightest interest in the social and democratic rights of the Tamil masses, but rather aim to advance the interests of the bourgeois Tamil elites at the expense of the working class and rural toilers.

During the election campaign, the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), the oldest Tamil party, supported Sajith Premadasa, presidential candidate of the right-wing Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), considering his promises to be most advantageous for the Tamil bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka.

An alliance including the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Front (EPRLF), and the Tamil People's National Alliance (TPNA) fielded P. Ariyanenthiran as its common presidential candidate.

Lastly, the Tamil National People's Front (TNPf), led by Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, postured as more radical and intransigent and called for a boycott of the election.

All of these factions promoted the illusion to the Tamil masses that its tactic would pressure the next government to improve living conditions and secure basic democratic rights.

Ordinary working Tamils, however, remember only too well the JVP's rabid Sinhala chauvinism and backing for the reactionary 27-year communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

In the final months of the war alone, the Sri Lankan military slaughtered tens of thousands of Tamil civilians in

2009. Thousands more were "disappeared" by military-backed death squads, and some 300,000 Tamil civilians were rounded up and held in military-run concentration camps.

On election day, 30 percent of voters in the North and East did not cast their votes. SJB candidate Sajith Premadasa and the incumbent president Ranil Wickremesinghe received 40.7 and 20.8 percent respectively, while the JVP/NPP received just 11.8 percent. The common candidate P. Ariyanenthiran trailed even further behind with just 3 percent.

Immediately after the election, however, the inveterate opportunists of the various Tamil bourgeois parties began fawning over Dissanayake.

ITAK spokesman M. A. Sumanthiran was quick to congratulate Dissanayake for his "impressive win, achieved without recourse to racial or religious chauvinism... We will be fully with him and will be a participant in eradicating corruption." He called for "change in which all minorities need equal access in the governmental power."

Current ITAK leader Sivagnanam Sritharan wished Dissanayake well and called on him "to ensure the basic rights of the Eelam people by taking politically astute actions to create a non-racial Sri Lanka." He met the new president on September 30 and handed him a letter that has not been made public.

The common candidate and his alliance also congratulated Dissanayake, telling him that he "can protect the multi-ethnic environment if he recognizes the self-determination and sovereignty of Tamils." Boycott leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam dropped his radical posturing and assured Dissanayake: "If the president is ready for our demands, the TNPf is also ready to work with him."

Central to the demands of all these parties is a devolution of powers to provincial councils in the North and East. This amounts in effect to a power-sharing arrangement with the Colombo political establishment, giving a greater say to the Tamil elites in the mutual exploitation of the working class.

On September 30, Tamil party leaders including Mavai

Senathirajah, Sritharan from ITAK, Siththarthan (PLOTE), Selvam Adaikalanthan (TELO), Suresh Premachanthiran (EPRLF) and several others met the Indian High Commissioner in Colombo, Santosh Jha, and urged India to press Dissanayake to implement greater provincial devolution.

According to Jaffna-based Tamil newspaper *Kalaikathir*, they complained that the “new president has expressed nothing clearly on the Tamil masses’ ethnic issues and has not expressed his position on this issue.”

In response, Jha declared that India would certainly insist Colombo to implement the whole of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution. It was part of the 1987 Indo-Lankan Accord that brought so-called Indian peace-keeping troops into the North to disarm the LTTE. While provincial councils were established, the amendment was never implemented in full.

If Dissanayake has “expressed nothing clearly,” it is because he is not wanting to unnecessarily alienate Tamil voters in the lead-up to the November 14 parliamentary election. The JVP, however, has always been bitterly hostile to the 13th amendment and the devolution of powers to provincial councils.

In the late 1980s, the JVP mounted a reactionary patriotic campaign against the Indo-Lankan Accord, denouncing “Indian imperialism” and declaring that the Accord was dividing the nation. Its gunmen carried out fascistic attacks, killing hundreds of workers, trade unionists and political opponents for refusing to support its campaign.

Now the Colombo political establishment, India and Tamil nationalist parties are sweeping this history under the rug.

With its ambitions to be the major regional power, however, India is primarily concerned about its own economic and security interests in dealing with Sri Lanka. Jha bluntly explained that New Delhi would always coordinate with Colombo and advance its ties through investment and aid. He said India was ready to collaborate with any Sri Lankan government and hinted that its primary concern was to consolidate Dissanayake’s support for the US-led war drive against China.

The Tamil party leaders, all of whom have lined up with the US and India against China, attempted to scare the Indian envoy with the bogeyman of the “Marxist” JVP, which would “act always along with China or in support of China.” They warned that even though the JVP says it has changed, “the future actions of the [JVP] rulers” would affect the ability of the US and India to seek allies against China.

Everyone in the room undoubtedly understood that the JVP never had anything to do with Marxism and long ago dropped its bogus socialistic rhetoric. Moreover, prior to the

presidential election, Dissanayake and JVP/NPP leaders held a series of discussions with US and Indian officials to offer assurances of support against China.

In different ways and for their own venal objectives, the Tamil bourgeois parties and the JVP/NPP are all supporting the geopolitical interests of US imperialism, as it wages war against Russia in Ukraine, backs the Israeli genocide in the Middle East and prepares for war against China—threatening a nuclear catastrophe for humanity.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on Tamil workers and poor to reject the reactionary nationalist policies of the Tamil parties, which have proven incapable of addressing the social crisis of the Tamil masses in the war-ravaged North and East. All of them backed the austerity program implemented under President Wickremesinghe and will do the same as Dissanayake implements the IMF agenda.

Like their counterparts in Colombo, the Tamil parties were horrified by the 2022 mass uprising that unified Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers and forced President Gotabaya Rajapakse to flee the country and resign. The unified movement, which was betrayed by the trade unions and the opposition parties, nevertheless revealed the enormous power of the working class.

The SEP is campaigning to unify workers in the fight for a socialist program as the only means to prevent war and defend essential democratic and social rights. Its longstanding political opposition against all forms of nationalism—including Sinhala chauvinism and Tamil separatism—is expressed in its fight for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka-Eelam, as part of a broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.



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