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Sri Lanka: Tamil People's Council calls rally to stir up Tamil nationalism

The Tamil People's Council (TPC), led by former Northern Provincial Council Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran, has organised a rally in Jaffna on September 16 titled "Eluka Tamil" or "Rise up Tamils." The revival of this reactionary nationalist campaign, which was initiated at the end of 2015, is aimed at dividing Sri Lankan workers along ethnic lines as they come into struggle.

The TPC is a front of several Tamil political parties, civil society groups, trade unions, university students and the relatives of people disappeared during Colombo's bloody 30-year communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

A TPC leaflet announcing the rally contains six demands: Stop the "Sinhalese colonisation" of the Tamil "homeland," bring Sri Lankan war criminals to international justice, release Tamil political prisoners, an international investigation into "the disappeared," stop the militarisation of Tamil areas and resettle all those displaced during the war. Demonstrations will be held outside the New York headquarters of the United Nations and the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva to coincide with the Jaffna rally.

The TPC campaign is in response to the ongoing suffering of Tamils in the North and East caused by the war and the de-facto military administration in the two provinces. Its demands, however, promote the deadly illusion that there is a national solution for Tamil people if they secure the support of the "international community."

The “international community” is a euphemism for US imperialism and India, its strategic partner in the region, and other major powers. These powers are serial violators of human rights, but cynically and selectively feign concern over certain minorities in order to advance their own geo-political interests. The TPC is not demanding the unconditional withdrawal of the Sri Lankan military from the North and East but calling on Colombo to stop the “militarisation” of the two provinces.

The revival of the TPC’s nationalist campaign is significant. The Sri Lankan political establishment, including the current government and key ally, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), is thoroughly discredited amongst workers and the poor across the country. Wigneswaran and his allies established the TPC at the end of 2015 in the face of widespread distrust of the TNA by the Tamil masses.

Along with the resurgence of international class struggle, key sections of the Sri Lankan working class have been involved in nationwide strikes and industrial action against the government’s International Monetary Fund-dictated austerity attacks on wages, living conditions and democratic rights. Last week non-academic university workers began a national strike over wages and conditions. On September 26 and 27, more than 200,000 teachers will launch similar action.

Colombo’s political elite and its bourgeois Tamil allies live in mortal fear of a unified movement of the Sri Lankan working class based on a socialist program. They recognise it is a danger to the existing order.

In January 2015, the TNA and other bourgeois parties endorsed the US-led regime-change operation to oust former President Mahinda Rajapakse and helped elevate Maithripala Sirisena into the presidency. Washington wanted Rajapakse removed because of his political and economic relations with Beijing.

Sirisena and the United National Party (UNP)-led front promised democratic rights, improved living conditions and a resolution of the problems facing the victims of war. The TNA gave credence to Sirisena’s bogus promises, none of which it had any intention of honouring.

In line with Washington’s demands, the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government distanced Sri Lanka from China, reoriented its foreign policy towards the US and India, and integrated its military into US forces. The TNA fully endorsed these changes.

While rising working-class opposition has produced deep divisions within the Sri Lankan political establishment, all factions of the ruling elite are united in the move towards dictatorial forms of rule. Sirisena's imposition of emergency rule and the national deployment of the military following the April 21 bombings of churches and hotels by an Islamic terrorist group were backed by every parliamentary party, including the TNA.

Last October, Wigneswaran established the Tamil People's Alliance (TPA), a new Tamil political party. He claimed he was following "people's politics" whilst declaring that his party would restart negotiations with the government and "bring international pressure" on Colombo (see: "**Wigneswaran's Tamil People's Alliance: A trap for Sri Lankan workers**").

The TPC and Wigneswaran's TPA have no fundamental differences with the TNA and endorse its pro-US and pro-Indian line. Addressing a June 3 Jaffna press conference, Wigneswaran praised the re-election of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu supremacist government.

"We should welcome the powerful government that came to power in India," he declared. He backed Modi's chauvinist, anti-Muslim campaign, insisting that India is surrounded by Muslim countries, such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, and "faces dangers from Islamic extremists."

In line with Washington's geo-political agenda against Beijing, Wigneswaran attacked China's Maritime Silk Road project, its collaboration with Pakistan, and warned that Sri Lankan participation would be used in "rounding up, blockading, and trapping India."

Wigneswaran claimed that if Tamil autonomy was granted in Sri Lanka, it would assist New Delhi in countering such threats. "When our autonomy is established, it will allow the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal to join hands in the security of India."

Wigneswaran and his TPC are clearly signaling to New Delhi and Washington that the Tamil bourgeoisie is ready to serve their geopolitical interests and assist in the war preparations against China.

The TPC is being supported by several Tamil media groups, including the Colombo-based *Veerakesari* and Jaffna-based *Thinakkural* newspapers, which have published articles endorsing the "Eluka Tamil" campaign.

An article by TPC adviser M. Thirunavukarasu in *Thinakkural* declared: "People and the parties who want to build an alternative leadership must come forward to show their unity

now. Other party members must break barriers and give strength to this demonstration and Elam nationalism.”

Tamil workers and youth must reject the TPC’s campaign and its reactionary nationalist politics. Irrespective of the tactical differences between the TPC and other Tamil parties, they are all serving imperialism and desperately working to prevent any unification of the Sri Lankan and international working class.

For the same reason, the Colombo-based capitalist parties and their Sinhala chauvinist allies are stepping up their anti-Tamil and anti-Muslim rhetoric. This, in turn, feeds into the reactionary posturing of the Tamil bourgeois parties and their nationalist campaigns. Such is the “class unity” of the Sinhala and Tamil ruling elites against the working class and poor.

The defeat of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan military—and the slaughter of tens of thousands of Tamil civilians during the final bloody assaults in May 2009—was not just a military question, but a damning exposure of the bankruptcy of the Tamil nationalists’ political perspective.

The TPC, like the LTTE and other Tamil bourgeois parties, is thoroughly hostile to unification of the Sri Lankan and international working class because this political unity threatens their class interests.

The source of the repression of the Tamils is the capitalist system. Since so-called independence in 1948, the Colombo ruling class and its successive governments have used anti-Tamil discrimination to defend Sri Lankan capitalism and the profit system.

In order to end this oppression and fight for their social and democratic rights, Tamil-speaking workers must unite with their Sinhala counterparts and turn to the Indian and international working class on the basis of a socialist program.

Democratic rights can only be won by ending capitalism and establishing a workers’ and peasants’ government in Sri Lanka, as part of the Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia and socialism internationally. The Socialist Equality Party is the only party fighting for this perspective.

The author also recommends:

A socialist perspective for the Sri Lankan university employees’ struggle

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