Sri Lankan election: Vote for Wije Dias and the Socialist Equality Party

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
17 November 2005

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls on working people in Sri Lanka to vote for Wije Dias in the presidential election today to demonstrate their support for a socialist alternative to war and social inequality. The SEP is the only party offering a program of struggle to unite working people—Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher, young and old, men and women—to fight for their social needs and democratic aspirations.

There are just two camps in this election. On the one side, there are the candidates of the ruling class—Mahinda Rajapakse of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party (UNP). Behind these are lined up all of the factions of the political establishment. The Sinhala chauvinists of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) have backed Rajapakse while various parties of the Tamil and Muslim elites support Wickremesinghe.

On the other side, there is the SEP, whose candidate articulates the interests of the working class. From the outset the SEP has made clear that it stands in diametrical opposition to the two bourgeois parties and all their apologists. Our manifesto declares: “The cornerstone of the SEP’s campaign is internationalism. The SEP is standing not simply to win votes in Sri Lanka, but to initiate a discussion throughout the Indian subcontinent on the necessity for workers to adopt a socialist program and perspective. To combat the predatory activities of global capital, the working class needs its own international strategy: the reorganisation of the world economy along socialist lines to meet the social needs of the majority, not the profits of a few.”

In the course of the campaign, the UNP and SLFP have demonstrated their organic incapacity to address the pressing problems of ordinary people. Rajapakse and Wickremesinghe have both gone to absurd lengths to offer promises to everyone, knowing full well that their plans will be vetoed by the IMF and World Bank. Neither candidate has offered any explanation for the repeated failure of his party to keep its promises from past elections.

Above all, neither party has a solution to the country’s long-running civil war. Rajapakse is fooling nobody with advertisements showing him clutching the dove of peace. As the price for his alliance with the JVP and JHU, he agreed to demand the revision of the current ceasefire with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and to tear up an existing agreement for the joint distribution of aid to the victims of the December 26 tsunami. These ultimatums to the LTTE, far from securing peace, will only set the course for war.

Wickremesinghe began the campaign declaring he would renew the “peace process”. But the peace talks, backed by corporate leaders in Colombo and the major powers, are not an attempt to resolve the outstanding democratic issues that led to the war. Rather, their aim is a powersharing arrangement between the ruling Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim elites that will pave the way for the island’s integration into global economic processes and intensify the exploitation of the working class.

As the campaign has worn on, Wickremesinghe has increasingly adapted to the chauvinist campaign of Rajapakse and his JVP cheerleaders. Senior UNP leaders have boasted that the party when in government from 2001 to 2004 “trapped” the LTTE in peace talks and helped bring about a debilitating split in the organisation in early 2004. The purpose of this bragging is to show that the UNP, like the SLFP, is also interested in destroying the LTTE. What it demonstrates is that both the parties responsible for prosecuting the war are incapable of extricating themselves from communal politics.

The SEP has not presented voters with long lists of false promises. Our candidate Wije Dias has bluntly warned that this election will resolve nothing and that, in its wake, the next president, whether Rajapakse or Wickremesinghe, will be compelled to intensify their onslaught on the living standards and democratic rights of working people. The SEP has insisted that the only way the working class can begin to solve its problems is to break decisively from the parties of the bourgeoisie and wage an independent political struggle

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for its own class interests. Such a struggle will inevitably strike a chord with workers throughout the region and internationally, as well as with poor peasants, oppressed communities and young people across the island.

The SEP advances a class solution to the war, based on the unity of Tamil and Sinhala workers and the rejection of all forms of racism and communalism. The SEP opposes the forcible maintenance of the unitary state and demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Sri Lankan military from the north and east. At the same time, the party rejects the LTTE's perspective of a separate capitalist statelet, which will only intensify the exploitation of the Tamil masses. We fight for the establishment of a United Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of a United Socialist States of South Asia and the world.

The SEP advocates the convening of a constituent assembly, democratically elected by working people, to draft and adopt a new, genuinely democratic constitution that abrogates all discriminatory laws based on race, caste, religion and sex, and repressive legislation such as the emergency powers and Prevention of Terrorism laws.

For workers in Sri Lanka and throughout the region to take up the fight for this socialist and internationalist perspective has become an urgent necessity. What capitalist governments are preparing was revealed at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) conference of regional leaders in Dhaka last week. At the top of the agenda was the closer economic integration of the region and its further opening to global capital, a process that will inevitably further undermine the social position of workers.

The SAARC leaders demonstrated a complete disregard for the poor of the region, particularly those affected by the Kashmiri earthquake and the tens of thousands of tsunami victims who, 11 months after the disaster, have received no assistance to put their shattered lives back together. Highly significant was the unanimous agreement at the conference on a tougher stand against "terrorism". Not only did this amount to tacit approval for the criminal actions of the US in Iraq, but it signalled the strengthening of the state apparatuses in each country—aimed not primarily against "terrorists", but against the mounting opposition and resistance of ordinary people to the agenda of economic restructuring.

The contempt of the ruling class for the sentiments of the masses is self-evident in the Sri Lankan election. Hundreds of thousands of Tamils in LTTE-controlled areas will have to run a gauntlet of obstacles imposed by the Supreme Court and Election Commissioner, with the backing of all the other parties, just in order to cast a vote. Some 1.5 million Sri Lankan citizens working in the Middle East—for the most part poor rural women—have been completely disenfranchised because no mechanism has been established for them to vote. In addition, there are already widespread reports of large numbers of voters being struck off the electoral role for political purposes.

Virtually the entire election campaign has taken place under a state of emergency imposed, with the agreement of almost all the parliamentary parties, after the assassination of foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar in August. Voters will go to the polls today with 95,000 police on the streets and 100,000 troops on standby for immediate deployment. Every one of the major political parties is capable of mobilising gangs to create deliberate provocations in rival strongholds in order to disrupt voting. The police have the power to impose a curfew, which, as many people have learned from bitter experience, will be designed more to cloak the work of thugs than to protect ordinary citizens. Under these conditions, to call this a "democratic" election is a fraud.

We call on voters to take a principled stand against the political representatives of the capitalist system and the disasters they have created by casting a ballot for the socialist solution advanced by Wije Dias and the SEP. Dias is a founding member of the Revolutionary Communist League, the SEP's forerunner formed in 1968 to fight for the principles of international socialism. He is a member of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the SEP's general secretary, and has devoted nearly four decades to the struggle for the emancipation of the working class.

Just as the ruling class is preparing its strategy for the aftermath of the elections, so the working class must adopt its own perspective. The SEP urges the many young people, workers, housewives, unemployed, professionals and intellectuals who have heard Wije Dias speak at meetings or through the media to become regular readers of the WSWS, to seriously study our program and policies and make the decision to join and build the SEP as the new mass party of the working class.

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