Socialist Equality Party rejects Sri Lankan government appeal to call off May Day rallies

By Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) will be issuing the following statement today in response to the government's call for the shutting down of all May Day rallies. The SEP will hold its May Day meeting at New Town Hall, Green Path, Colombo at 3 p.m.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) condemns the government's "appeal" to all political parties to cancel May Day rallies today. This attempt to stifle political activity on May 1, a day long associated with the historical struggles of the international working class, is directed towards suppressing any independent movement of workers, as President Mahinda Rajapakse recklessly plunges the island towards war.

The government's "appeal" for the cancellation of May Day rallies on the grounds of "security" is a sharp warning that further attacks on the basic democratic rights of the working class are being prepared. Once again, working people are going to be called on to sacrifice for a reactionary communal war that has already claimed more than 65,000 lives.

All the major parties—government and opposition—have immediately fallen into line without a murmur of protest. The entire political establishment in Colombo is closing ranks in preparation for a new bloodbath and to enforce further attacks on democratic rights and living standards in the name of "defending the nation".

The government's pretext of "security" is completely cynical. The ruling United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) is responsible for creating the present extreme tensions with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that have produced an escalating cycle of violence in the North and East and the danger of open warfare.

Rajapakse only narrowly won the presidential election last November with the backing of the Sinhala extremists of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). Their demands for a complete revision of the 2002 ceasefire and the dismissal of Norway as the formal facilitator of the "peace process" have effectively destroyed the prospect for resurrecting meaningful negotiations.

Since the first round of talks in Geneva in February, the government, the security forces and their Sinhala chauvinist allies have conspired in one provocation after another to ensure that a second round was not held. Last month, the military announced that it would no longer transport LTTE leaders from the East to the LTTE headquarters in the Wanni—as it has done in the previous three years.

Less than two weeks before the second Geneva round, a prominent pro-LTTE politician V. Vigneswaran was gunned down on April 7 in broad daylight in Trincomalee. In the midst of protests over his murder, a bomb was triggered in a market in the same town followed by a communal rampage against Tamils. There is no doubt that a shadowy coalition of layers of the armed forces, associated Tamil militaries and Sinhala extremists is responsible for provoking the spiralling violence that has claimed more than 100 lives in the last month and led to the cancellation of the second Geneva round.

Having provoked and goaded the LTTE for months, it is no surprise there was a response—a suicide bombing at the Colombo military headquarters on April 25 directed against the hard-line Army Commander Sarath Fonseka. The attack was almost certainly carried out by the LTTE and is further proof of its political bankruptcy. Like its bourgeois counterparts in Colombo, the LTTE has no answer to the pressing social needs of working people and whips up anti-Sinhala chauvinism to divide workers along communal lines.

It is no accident that the clamour for war on both sides is intensifying amid the deepening opposition of workers—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—to the continuing

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erosion of living standards. Like his phony claims to be “a man of peace”, all of Rajapakse’s election promises to assist working people have proven false. Hundreds of thousands of public sector workers have been waging a campaign for a decent wage to meet the rising cost of living. Poor farmers are engaged in protests for decent prices for their produce as the government slashes subsidies and other forms of rural assistance.

As on every similar occasion since independence in 1948, the ruling elites have only one response to any movement by the working class: to stir up the poison of communal politics to prevent a unified struggle against capitalism. The last thing that the Rajapakse wants is for May Day 2006 to become the focus for all the seething hostility, resentment and anger felt by broad layers of workers and the urban and rural poor. Alongside the government across this deep class divide are all those who falsely claim to speak for workers—the JVP, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and Communist Party (CP) as well as the trade union leaderships.

The working class is standing at a crossroads. As the political representatives of the ruling class prepare to thrust the island back to war, they are also planning a class war on the social position of working people. The so-called peace process offers no alternative. The imperialist powers and the Colombo corporate elite are promoting a negotiated settlement to open the way for a far-reaching restructuring program of privatisation and budget cutbacks to meet the demands of foreign investors.

The SEP will hold its May Day rally in Colombo today to fight for the necessary socialist alternative for the working class. The first step in any struggle to defend living standards and democratic rights is a complete political break from all parties and factions of the ruling class and the rejection of all forms of nationalism, communalism and chauvinism. Workers must treat with contempt those who condemn as “unpatriotic” the refusal to abandon the right to hold May Day rallies that was fought for and won by preceding generations of the working class.

The SEP advances a class solution to war, social inequality and attacks on democratic rights. We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all security forces from the war zones of the North and East as the means of unifying Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers against the capitalist government in Colombo and the bourgeois nationalist LTTE.

To resolve all the long outstanding issues of democratic rights and to end all forms of discrimination, the SEP insists that a new constitution is needed. But the drafting of the constitution must be done democratically. Unlike in 1972 and 1978, when the existing parliaments fraudulently turned themselves into constituent assemblies, a new constitution must be drafted and adopted by a genuine constituent assembly, democratically elected by working people for that specific purpose.

Genuine democracy means more than the formal equality of the bourgeois legal system and parliamentary elections, which always favour the rich and privileged. The economic foundation of society must be transformed to serve the interests of the broad masses of the working people. That is why the SEP advocates a socialist program to place all the major financial, industrial and trading enterprises under democratic, public ownership and control to meet the needs of the vast majority of society, not the profits of the wealthy few.

Socialism cannot be achieved on a single, small island in South Asia, nor indeed in any isolated nation, large or small. The struggle for socialism is necessarily international. The only alternative to the predatory activities of global capitalism is a unified international counteroffensive by the working class to refashion society along socialist lines. The struggle for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam is only a component of the wider struggle for a United Socialist States of South Asia and internationally. This is the program fought for by the SEP and all the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) through the *World Socialist Web Site*.

We urge workers, young people, housewives and intellectuals to defy the government’s appeal to cancel all political activity on May Day and to attend our rally today at New Town Hall, Green Path, Colombo at 3 p.m. to discuss these crucial political issues.

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