Sri Lankan election: Vote for the Socialist Equality Party

The Socialist Equality Party
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls on working people to vote for its candidates in Sri Lanka's provincial council elections on February 14. A vote for the SEP is a vote for a socialist program to end the government's communal war, attacks on democratic rights and deepening assault on living standards.

The SEP is fielding two slates of 19 candidates—one in Nuwara Eliya district in Central Province and the other in Puttalam district in North-western Province. Mylvaganam Thevarajah heads the Nuwara Eliya slate and Nihal Geekiyanage leads the ticket in Puttalam. Both are longstanding SEP members with decades of experience in defending the democratic rights and class interests of all workers—Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim alike.

This election is dominated by the criminal war restarted and intensified by President Mahinda Rajapakse and his government. Rajapakse's renewed "war on terrorism" against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has resulted in more death, destruction and suffering than at any other time in the 25-year conflict. It has been fully backed by the two major opposition parties—the rightwing United National Party (UNP) and the Sinhala extremist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

The SEP candidates stand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Sri Lankan security forces from the North and East of the island. In advancing this demand, the SEP offers no political support to the LTTE or its call for a separate capitalist statelet of Eelam. We seek to unify the working class and oppressed masses in a common struggle for a workers' and farmers' government based on socialist policies.

The SEP insists that socialism is not possible on one island. Any struggle against the Colombo government and local employers inevitably confronts powerful international forces. Behind Rajapakse's war lie its imperialist backers—above all, the US. At the same time, workers in Sri Lanka are part of the international working class, exploited by the same global giants as workers throughout Asia and across the globe.

That is why the SEP fights, along with its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia and the world.

President Rajapakse and his ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) have campaigned exclusively on their military's victories over the LTTE. His promises that ending the war will usher in a new period of prosperity and democracy are a fraud. For 60 years, successive governments in Colombo have whipped up anti-Tamil chauvinism to divide workers and cultivate a social base of support. That is what led to the war in the first place.

Speaking in Kandy on February 10, Rajapakse indicated his intentions: "We said that this election was not just an election, but an election to strengthen our war heroes. Some people in our own country worked to set traps to block the path of the war heroes. That's why we say that our victory in north-western and central provincial council elections will strengthen us."

Behind his rhetoric, Rajapakse pointed to a basic truth: the army's victories, bought at the expense of tens of thousands of lives, will strengthen the position of the most militarist and reactionary factions of the Colombo political establishment. And they will be encouraged to intensify repression against their opponents—above all, the working class.

The government's ruthless prosecution of the war in Mullaithivu district must sound a warning. Having corralled the LTTE, along with an estimated 250,000 civilians, into a small patch of territory, the army is unleashing its firepower with criminal disregard for the consequences. Hundreds of civilians have been killed and thousands more injured. A plan is now being prepared to herd "liberated" survivors into huge "welfare villages"—in reality, concentration camps guarded by the military.

Already the "liberated" East has been transformed into a vast military camp presided over by the security forces and the government's ally, Chief Minister Pilliyan, head of the notorious Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulihal (TMVP) paramilitary outfit. Similar measures will be implemented elsewhere.

Having virtually bankrupted the state to pay for the war, Rajapakse confronts the worst global economic crisis since the 1930s. Unable to repay old loans or raise new ones, the government faces a looming foreign exchange crisis. Commodity prices and export incomes are collapsing. Foreign investors are fleeing.

For the working class the war has resulted in soaring prices, higher taxes and savage cutbacks to subsidies, public sector jobs and education, health and welfare. As the global tsunami threatens to overwhelm the island's economy, the ruling elite has deep fears about the explosive political consequences.

Rajapakse has already revealed how the government will respond. Again and again, he has denounced striking workers and protesting farmers and students for undermining the war effort, and threatened to use his extensive emergency powers against them. The government already functions as a cabal of select ministers, generals, senior bureaucrats and cronies who consider themselves above parliament, the law and the constitution and who depend on threats, repression and death squads to silence opposition.

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The main opposition parties—the UNP and JVP—are accomplices in Rajapakse's war. The UNP, which signed the ceasefire in 2002 and initiated peace talks with the LTTE, now insists that the entire process was nothing but a clever ruse to enable the army to prepare for renewed war. UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe sought to prove his patriotic ardour in a recent statement that "saluted the armed forces for its military victories" and paid tribute to the government "for overseeing the conduct of these military operations."

The JVP, which led a chauvinist campaign against the 2002 ceasefire, claims credit for pressing Rajapakse to restart the war and shares responsibility for its consequences. The JVP also bears responsibility for sabotaging the efforts of workers to fight to defend their pay and conditions. In strike after strike, JVP leaders caved in as soon as the government accused workers of undermining the war effort.

Aware of growing anger over falling living standards, the JVP has begun a populist campaign, vigorously denouncing the government for corruption and wastage—as if removing a few ministers and ending kickbacks will solve the immense economic problems created by the global crisis of capitalism and a quarter century of war.

Two middle class radical outfits—the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and United Socialist Party (USP)—are also standing candidates. For the last three decades, the NSSP and the breakaway USP have functioned as left safety valves for the political establishment, promoting illusions in the bourgeois parties and, above all, blocking any independent political movement of the working class.

In the latest poll the NSSP and USP have plumbed new depths by forging an alliance with the rightwing UNP—the first party of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie. In a series of extraordinary political somersaults, these opportunists claim that the UNP, which launched the war in 1983 and is notorious for past democratic abuses and state repression, represents the "lesser evil" compared to the "authoritarian" Rajapakse government.

The only constant in the policies of the NSSP and USP is their support for the "international peace process"—the imperialist-sponsored peace talks between the government and the LTTE—despite the fact that all its promoters—the US, Japan, the EU and Norway—are openly or tacitly backing Rajapakse's war. This will not stop the NSSP and USP continuing to plead with the UNP to pressure the major powers to revive this fraudulent "peace process".

The working class confronts serious dangers. Many voters feel alienated and distrustful, not only of the government and its criminal war, but of the entire political establishment. These sentiments, however, are not sufficient for advancing the interests of working people.

The SEP is standing in the election to present a socialist alternative to war and social inequality. We seek to mobilise the working class and the rural masses in an independent, political movement against the root cause of the war and the economic crisis—the capitalist profit system.

The first plank of our platform is internationalism. The SEP calls on working people to reject all forms of nationalism and communalism, including the Sinhala supremacism of the Sri Lankan establishment and the Tamil separatism of the LTTE. Only by uniting all workers, regardless of their religion, ethnicity and language, can a joint struggle be waged for the common class interests of all.

It is an elementary duty of the Sri Lankan working class to defend the democratic rights of the minority Tamil population by demanding an immediate end to the military occupation of the North and East. That is the first step in overcoming the legacy of decades of discrimination and establishing the basis for a common struggle against capitalism. The struggle for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam would resonate throughout the Indian subcontinent, itself plagued by communal and ethnic conflict for decades.

The prerequisite for an offensive against the profit system is the political independence of the working class from all parties, factions and groupings of the ruling class. The history of Sri Lanka is littered with tragedies born out of the subordination of the working class to supposedly "progressive" factions of the ruling class. Much of the present situation can be traced to the abandonment by the LSSP of the program of socialist internationalism and its entry into the bourgeois Bandaranaike government in 1964.

Only by mobilising independently and advancing the perspective for a workers' and farmers' government can the working class win to its side the downtrodden rural masses, mired in economic backwardness, debt and poverty. Such a perspective entails nothing less than the fight for the complete refashioning of society from top to bottom to meet the social needs of the majority, not the private profits of a wealthy few.

The SEP is uniquely qualified to lead this struggle. Since it was founded in 1968 against the LSSP's betrayal, the SEP and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League, have waged a courageous and protracted struggle for the principles of socialist internationalism—Trotskyism--against all forms of nationalist, communalist and opportunist politics. The RCL/SEP is the only party in Sri Lanka that has opposed the war continuously from the outset.

The SEP calls on workers and young people to register a vote for a socialist alternative to war and social inequality. At the same time, we urge you to study our program and perspective, as presented daily on the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS), the international organ of the ICFI and apply to join and build the SEP as the mass revolutionary party of the working class.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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