

Sri Lanka: Vote for the SEP in the provincial election

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls on workers, young people and intellectuals to vote for its candidates in the Western Provincial Council election to be held tomorrow. The SEP is standing a slate of 46 candidates, led by Vilani Peiris, for the Colombo District. All the candidates have a record of principled struggle for the interests of the working class, based on the perspective of socialist internationalism.

This election takes place as the government perpetrates terrible crimes against tens of thousands of Tamil civilians still trapped in the no-fire zone in northern Mullaithivu district. This week alone, hundreds of people have been killed and many more seriously injured. Tens of thousands of refugees are being herded into internment camps guarded by military.

The army has launched its “final assault” on the remaining area held by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with callous indifference to human life. The SEP denounces the government’s war crimes and urges working people to take a stand on behalf of the tens of thousands of defenceless, trapped men, women and children. A vote for the SEP is a vote against the government’s communal war and its ongoing assault on democratic rights and living standards.

The government’s propaganda is based on lies. It is not waging a “war on terrorism” but seeking to entrench the power and privileges of the Sinhala ruling elites at the expense of the working class as a whole. Its claims to be “liberating” Tamils from the LTTE are belied by its treatment of fleeing civilians as prisoners of war.

The SEP’s campaign seeks to unite workers—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—against the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)-led government of President Mahinda Rajapakse and the entire Colombo political and media establishment that has backed his reactionary war. At the same time, the SEP

gives no political support whatsoever to the LTTE, whose perspective of a capitalist state of Eelam has proven to be a bloody trap for the Tamil masses.

The SEP’s demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Sri Lankan military forces from the North and East is not to aid the LTTE. Rather, its purpose is to overcome the communal divide and unify workers in the revolutionary struggle for a workers’ and farmers’ government based on socialist policies.

Now more than ever, the working class needs to fight for its own independent class interests in opposition to all the parties of the bourgeoisie. The crushing of the LTTE will not inaugurate a new period of peace and prosperity. The recent military victories have strengthened the most right-wing sections of Colombo’s ruling elite, which is already preparing for an onslaught on the living standards of the working class.

The sharpest warning should be taken from an editorial in the right-wing *Island* on Thursday. Heaping praise on Rajapakse’s crimes as “life-saving surgery,” the newspaper declared: “The same method yielded impressive results in 1971 and in the late 1980s, when the South was plunged into a bloodbath. An SLFP-led government successfully put down the first insurrection and a UNP government crushed the second one 18 years later.”

The reference to the crushing of the 1971 Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led uprising and again in 1989 is an ominous sign of what is in store for working people throughout the island. The state repression was not primarily directed against the JVP but against Sinhala rural youth rebelling against their impoverished conditions. The “life-saving surgery” cost the lives of at least 17,000 people in 1971 and another 60,000 in the late 1980s.

Amid a rapidly deepening economic crisis, commentators

are already using the language of war to describe the measures that the government has to impose on the working class. Having bankrupted the country to pay for the war, Rajapakse has been forced to ask the IMF for a huge \$US1.9 billion loan. Already the implications for workers are evident in the government's freezing of public sector wages and jobs, new taxes, the floating of the rupee and its green light for private sector layoffs and shorter working weeks.

The *Island* editorial makes clear that the Colombo political establishment is well aware that such measures cannot be imposed without provoking resistance. The police-state measures, which the government justifies in the name of the war against the LTTE—draconian emergency powers, detention without trial and the operation of military-sanctioned death squads—can and will be used against workers, farmers and young people seeking to defend their living standards.

In a statement on Wednesday, Rajapakse put anyone who opposed him in the same basket as LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran. "Today there is only one enemy and two sides in the political, social and cultural spectrum. The two sides are those who support him and those who oppose him," the president declared.

In the past period, the government has denounced striking workers and protesting farmers as accomplices of the "terrorist Tigers". As the country's economic turmoil worsens, it will not be long before working people are being likewise vilified as "economic terrorists" for demanding their rights and basic social needs.

Both the major opposition parties—the United National Party (UNP) and the JVP—have unconditionally backed the war. The Sinhala chauvinist JVP has long ago jettisoned its Maoist guerrillaism and become part of the Colombo establishment. Just as it has repeatedly called off industrial action and demanded workers sacrifice for the war effort, the JVP will be in the forefront of insisting that working people sacrifice for the economic good of the nation.

The two middle class radical outfits—the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and United Socialist Party (USP)—claim to oppose the war. Both parties fundamentally reject the independent mobilisation of the working class on the basis of socialist policies, instead attempting to politically subordinate it to one or other section of the bourgeoisie. Like the LTTE, the NSSP and USP make pointless appeals to the major imperialist powers, which have backed Rajapakse's war, to intervene and impose a

ceasefire.

The NSSP and USP support the right-wing UNP as the "lesser evil" and claim that this big business party will oppose the abuses of the Rajapakse government. The UNP not only started the war in 1983 but is directly responsible for gross abuses of democratic rights, including the slaughter of Sinhala rural youth in the late 1980s. By establishing a bloc with the UNP, the NSSP and USP seek to block any independent movement of the working class, only encouraging the Rajapakse government to deepen its attacks.

The SEP urges working people to place no faith in any of the parties of the bourgeoisie or their radical apologists. We insist that the working class must rely on its own independent strength and fight for a socialist alternative to the barbarism of the profit system and the reactionary policies of its political representatives.

The cornerstone of our program is internationalism. Working people must reject all forms of nationalism and communalism—Sinhala supremacism as well as Tamil separatism—and unify to defend their common class interests. The struggle for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam is inconceivable outside of the broader political fight for the United Socialist States of South Asia and world socialism.

The SEP is the only party fighting for the principles of socialist internationalism in this election. Our party was formed in 1968 as the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) to continue the struggle for Trotskyism in Sri Lanka, which was betrayed by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) when it entered the coalition government of Madame Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964.

We urge all those who support our policies to vote for our candidates, study our history and program and join and build the SEP, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, as the mass revolutionary party of the working class.



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