

Vote for Wije Dias, SEP presidential candidate

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)

22 January 2010

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls on workers and youth to vote for Wije Dias, its presidential candidate in the January 26 elections. Dias is the only candidate advocating a socialist program and fighting for the interests of the working class.

The two leading bourgeois candidates—incumbent President Mahinda Rajapakse and his opponent General Sarath Fonseka—for all the bitterness of their rivalry, have the same fundamental program. Whoever wins will defend the interests of the wealthy elite by imposing the burden of the worsening economic crisis onto the backs of working people.

While they now accuse each other of war crimes, both men are responsible for the war that brought nothing but death, destruction and the abuse of democratic rights. The president never disagreed with his top general or vice versa when the army was slaughtering civilians, its death squads were killing or disappearing hundreds of people, or soldiers were herding a quarter of a million Tamil men, women and children into detention camps.

The army defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) last May, but what have working people to show for the past seven months? Rajapakse promised peace and prosperity, but prices continue to climb and living standards decline. Moreover, the brutal manner in which Rajapakse and Fonseka waged the war has engendered lasting communal hatreds that will inevitably produce further ethnic frictions and conflict.

The military conflict is over but the entire police-state apparatus, including the state of emergency and draconian anti-terror laws, is still in place. Already the president has used his emergency powers against striking workers whose only crime was to demand decent wages. Once the election is over, the next government will have no compunction in using the full force of the police state to suppress any criticism or opposition to its agenda.

Rajapakse declares in his manifesto that he will turn Sri Lanka into “the Wonder of Asia”. He has concocted this fantasy both to woo foreign investors and dupe voters. In fact, Rajapakse called the early election because he knows that economic conditions are going to dramatically worsen, not get better, in the months ahead. He even postponed the budget until

after the poll in order to hide the savage economic medicine being demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in return for its \$2.6 billion loan.

Fonseka is just as big a liar. He promises he can provide everything to everyone—jobs, welfare, education, health care and much more—by eliminating the waste and corruption of the Rajapakse regime. All this is to cover up the real source of the economic and social crisis facing working people, which is the bankrupt capitalist system itself. The corruption that is endemic to the Colombo political establishment is rooted in this economic order that benefits the wealthy few at the expense of the vast majority.

Neither Rajapakse nor Fonseka can talk honestly about the real economic situation. The worst global economic crisis since the 1930s is not over; it is entering a new stage. The huge bailouts to the banks and corporations have resulted in massive debts running into trillions of dollars that now have to be imposed on the working class. Far from being immune, Sri Lanka is heavily indebted as a result of years of high military spending. Exports have slumped. Rajapakse had to borrow from the IMF to prevent the country going into bankruptcy. Now workers are going to be made to pay the price.

Powerful sections of the ruling elite are backing Fonseka because they think he is better equipped to impose the necessary economic measures. And the general understands what is wanted. He recently told business leaders: “Sri Lanka at this juncture needs a leader, who is disciplined, committed, honest, forthright and not afraid to make tough decisions”. All the efforts of the opposition parties—the United National Party (UNP) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—to dress up this ruthless general as a “democrat” amount to a shameless fraud.

Both men are also dragging the island into the maelstrom of international rivalries that is swirling around South Asia—but in different directions. Rajapakse has increasingly relied on China and its allies for diplomatic support, finance, investment and arms. He has denounced efforts by the US and Europe to pressure his government as “an international conspiracy”. Fonseka speaks for sections of the ruling elite that are deeply concerned about rupturing the country’s traditional ties. Speaking to business leaders, he lashed out at Rajapakse for trying to “to stoke up anti-West fervour and hoodwink people

that the West are all out to undermine the country's economic progress".

Nothing positive can come from lining up behind one or other group of predatory powers. The US is already waging wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and pushing Pakistan into civil war in order to advance its economic and strategic interests in the region. China is seeking to consolidate supplies of raw materials and energy in the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and internationally. The working class in Sri Lanka must stand with its class brothers and sisters throughout the region against all these intrigues, manoeuvres and wars.

All the other parties have lined up behind Rajapakse and Fonseka. In the plantation areas, the unions, including the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and the Up Country Peoples Front (UPF), are supporting Fonseka or Rajapakse according to which they think more likely to be successful and give them ministerial posts.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which previously functioned as the LTTE's mouthpiece, has changed its allegiances to Fonseka—the man who ruthlessly prosecuted the offensive against the LTTE. In an extraordinary about-face, the TNA now claims that the general will listen sympathetically to the problems of Tamils. All this obscene grovelling is to ensure a place for the TNA within the Colombo political establishment.

The LTTE's military defeat was above all the outcome of the political bankruptcy of its perspective of a separate capitalist Tamil state. Its communal politics, anti-democratic methods and terrorist attacks on civilians helped divide the working class and cut it off from not only the Sinhalese, but also the Tamil masses. There is no separate solution for Tamil workers and youth. The democratic rights of Tamils will only be won as part of a unified struggle of the working class to abolish capitalism.

The ex-lefts of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and United Socialist Party (USP) are also fielding candidates, but only to tie more critically-minded workers and youth to one or other faction of the ruling class. The USP candidate Siritunga Jayasuriya recently appeared on the UNP's bogus "Platform for Freedom" helping to dress up this right-wing party—and thus its candidate Fonseka—as democrats. The NSSP has taken a different tack, throwing its support behind a TNA dissident who is trying to breathe life back into the dangerous illusion that there is some separate solution for the Tamil masses under capitalism.

Workers should reject all the attempts to hoodwink them into believing that either Fonseka or Rajapakse is the lesser of the two evils. The brutal truth is that this election will solve none of the problems facing working people. The record of the past 60 years since independence stands as an indictment of the bourgeoisie as a whole, which has produced only war, poverty and gross abuses of democratic rights. Now as the economic crisis worsens, those who waged the communal war are

preparing to launch an "economic war" against working people as a whole.

The SEP is campaigning in the election to educate and mobilise workers and youth in preparation for the class battles ahead. Only by making a fundamental break with all the parties of the ruling class and relying on its own strength can the working class defend any of its basic rights. We urge all working people to cast their vote for our candidate Wije Dias to register their conscious support for a socialist and internationalist alternative and their opposition to the entire political establishment and its reactionary program.

Wije Dias is the SEP's general secretary and a member of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*. As a founding member of the SEP's forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), he embodies the party's four decades of struggle of principled struggle. The SEP is the only party that intransigently opposed the 26-year war and demanded the immediate withdrawal of troops from the North and East.

The SEP continues to demand an immediate end to the military occupation, the release of all political prisoners and the abolition of all repressive laws. Our perspective is not based on parliamentary manoeuvres but the independent mobilisation of the working class and rural masses in a common struggle for a workers' and farmers' government to restructure society on socialist lines. That is the meaning of our call for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the broader struggle for socialism throughout South Asia and internationally.

We urge workers and youth to vote for the SEP, study our election manifesto and join and build the SEP as the mass party of the working class in Sri Lanka and South Asia.

The author also recommends:

SEP manifesto for the 2010 Sri Lankan presidential election

A socialist program to fight for social equality and democratic rights

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