

Sri Lankan election: Vote for the Socialist Equality Party

The Socialist Equality Party
8 April 2010

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls on workers, young people, intellectuals and the rural poor to vote for its candidates in the general election being held today. The party is standing slates of candidates in four electoral districts—Colombo, Nuwara Eliya, Jaffna and Galle. The SEP is the only party advancing a socialist alternative to combat the deepening attacks on the living standards and democratic rights of working people.

The election will set the stage for a further, far reaching assault on the social position of the Sri Lankan working class. It takes place as the global economic crisis—the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s—enters a new stage. In 2008 and 2009, governments around the world pumped trillions of dollars into stimulus packages and bailouts to save the major banks and corporations. Now the financial elites that created the disaster are demanding that the mountain of public debt be offloaded onto working people.

Greece is being used as a test case in attacking workers' rights through wage cutting, the destruction of jobs and the slashing of essential services. Portugal, Spain and Italy are the next in line, but workers in every country confront a similar situation. What is opening up is a new period of class struggle as the working class is driven to defend its basic rights. Already the working class in Greece and Europe has engaged in strikes and protests, only to have these struggles undermined by the trade unions.

At the same time, the economic crisis is fuelling great power rivalry and the eruption of militarism. Sri Lanka together with the entire Indian subcontinent is becoming embroiled in the efforts of US imperialism to offset its economic decline by establishing its dominance through wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Pakistan. The bitter divisions in Sri Lanka ruling circles are primarily over foreign policy—President Mahinda Rajapakse relied on Beijing for support in his war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE); the opposition parties are more

oriented to the country's traditional allies in Europe and the US.

The central plank of the SEP's program is the struggle for socialist internationalism. The eruption of global economic turmoil and the drive to new and more terrible wars makes clear that none of the problems confronting the working class can be resolved on a national basis in Sri Lanka or anywhere else. Workers in Sri Lanka must turn to their class brothers and sisters internationally, especially across South Asia, to forge a unified movement to abolish capitalism, which is the source of social inequality, war and the attacks on democratic rights.

President Rajapakse fraudulently claims that Sri Lanka is immune from the world economic crisis. He boasted that the defeat of the LTTE last May would usher in a new era of peace and prosperity, but the protracted civil war has devastated the island and saddled the economy with huge debts. In return for its emergency loan, the IMF is now demanding that the budget deficit be halved by 2011, which can only be done through new taxes and slashing public spending on health, education and welfare.

Nervous about a backlash from the working class, Rajapakse postponed the budget last November, called an early presidential election in January and then today's general election. Once these are out of the way, he intends to bring down a budget in May to implement the IMF's austerity demands. Rajapakse is consolidating the police state apparatus built up during 26 years of civil war to suppress the inevitable opposition of workers to what he describes as his new "war on the development front".

Rajapakse has already demonstrated that there is no line he will not cross. In the final months of the war, the military slaughtered thousands of civilians. Following the LTTE's defeat, a quarter of a million men, women and children were herded into prison camps. Over the past five years, hundreds

of people have been killed by pro-government death squads. Following the presidential election, the opposition candidate, former Army Commander Sarath Fonseka, and dozens of his supporters were arrested. Now the government is campaigning for a two-thirds parliamentary majority so it can change the constitution and extend its autocratic powers.

The opposition United National Party and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) have no fundamental differences with the government. These parties supported the war and all of the military's war crimes. They now posture as defenders of democratic rights, but they once again made no effort to block the ratification of the state of emergency in parliament on Tuesday. The UNP and the JVP are mooted a coalition government if they win the election, but these parties will be just as ruthless as Rajapakse in implementing the IMF's demands.

During and after the war, workers have repeatedly shown their determination to fight for their rights. Again and again, however, the trade unions have assisted the government in obstructing and sabotaging these struggles. In 2006 and 2009, the plantation unions implemented the diktats of the Rajapakse regime to shut down pay campaigns by hundreds of thousands of workers. Last October, Rajapakse used his emergency powers to ban industrial action by port, petroleum, power and water workers, but it was the unions that enforced the presidential order. These unions function as nothing other than industrial policemen for the corporations and the capitalist state.

The ex-radicals of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the United Socialist Party (USP) play the critical role for the ruling class in blocking any independent movement of the working class. They insist that workers have no alternative but to rely on the trade unions to defend their living standards, and the right-wing opposition parties to defend their democratic rights. The USP even boasts of its role in forming the misnamed "Platform for Freedom" with the right-wing UNP. By shackling the working class to these pro-capitalist parties and organisations, the pseudo-lefts ensure that its struggles will be defeated.

The SEP is convinced that a new period of revolutionary struggles is opening up in Sri Lanka and internationally. Workers, young people and the poor of the villages and towns are deeply alienated from the entire political establishment and will not passively accept the new attacks being planned. The SEP has intervened in this election above all to prepare the working class for the coming class confrontations. That means a complete political break from

all of the capitalist parties, the trade unions and their ex-radical appendages. Only by establishing its own political independence can the working class begin to rouse the oppressed masses in the struggle for power and the establishment of a workers' and farmers' government.

We call for the formation of action committees in workplaces, working class neighbourhoods and villages so that working people can fight for their rights. During the wage campaign in the plantations last year, workers at the Balmoral Estate demonstrated the revolutionary potential of the working class as a whole by breaking decisively with the trade unions and forming their own independent action committee. These struggles will only go forward to the extent that they are guided by a socialist program to abolish capitalism and refashion society to meet the social needs of the majority, not the profits of the wealthy few.

The SEP fights for the international unity of the working class. Workers cannot fight for their common class interests if they are divided along national, ethnic and linguistic lines. They must reject all forms of nationalism and communalism—both Sinhala supremacism and Tamil separatism—that has been exploited for decades to split Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim working people. The devastation of a quarter century of communal conflict is a damning indictment both of the Colombo establishment that waged the war and the LTTE that represented the Tamil elites and advocated a separate capitalist state. The SEP calls for a united Socialist Republic of Eelam and Sri Lanka as part of the struggle for socialism throughout South Asia and internationally.

We call on workers and youth to vote for the SEP today as a means of demonstrating their support for a revolutionary socialist alternative. Above all, however, we urge working people to prepare for the coming class struggles by studying our program and perspective through the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site*, and by applying to join and build the SEP as the new mass party of the working class in Sri Lanka and throughout South Asia.



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