

Sri Lankan SEP to contest provincial council election in Jaffna

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka is contesting the Jaffna District in the provincial council election for Northern Province to be held on September 21. Elections for the Central and North-western Provinces will be held on the same day.

In opposition to a long list of political parties and independent groups, the SEP is the only party advancing an international socialist program to oppose militarism and defend the democratic rights and living standards of the working class and oppressed masses.

In order to meet electoral requirements, the SEP is fielding a slate of 19 candidates headed by Thirugnanam Sampanthar, a long-time party member.

The SEP will use the election to explain the critical political issues facing the working class. In response to a growing crisis of global capitalism, the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse, like its counterparts around the world, is seeking to impose a social counter-revolution against workers and youth.

At the same time, Sri Lanka is being increasingly dragged into the vortex of geo-political conflict between global and regional powers. The sharpest expression is the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" aimed at undermining Chinese influence and the US preparations for war against China.

To impose his policies, President Mahinda Rajapakse is preparing to use the police state apparatus, built up during decades of communal war, against the working class. The war-torn Northern and Eastern provinces are still under military occupation more than four years after the defeat of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The military has penetrated into all aspects of civilian life, including the control of economic activities.

Rajapakse did not want to hold an election in the predominantly Tamil Northern Province. His

government rests on the military and Sinhala chauvinist allies that are deeply opposed to any concessions to the Tamil elite. The president has only called the election in response to pressure from the US, India, Japan and other powers.

The US and India are not concerned about the democratic rights of Tamils in Sri Lanka. They supported Rajapakse's communal war and covered up for the military's atrocities and war crimes. The US only began to raise the issue of "human rights" as the LTTE's defeat was imminent, as a means of bullying the Rajapakse government into distancing itself from China.

India pressed for the election in Northern Province in a bid to pacify public outrage in its southern state of Tamil Nadu over the treatment of Tamils in Sri Lanka. New Delhi also pressured Rajapakse to postpone plans to repeal provincial council police and land powers, as demanded by Sinhala chauvinist parties.

The government's decision to hold elections for the Central and North Western provinces prematurely is a political manoeuvre. By winning these two elections, by hook or by crook, Rajapakse will claim a popular mandate for his policies. He will use an election win to justify his austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund.

The Rajapakse government, which was politically responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians in the final months of the civil war, is particularly hated among workers, farmers and youth in the North. It will resort to any means, including violence, to undermine its political opponents. Its coalition partner, the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), is notorious for its use of armed thugs, who operate in Jaffna with the tacit support of the military.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress is also part of

Rajapakse's coalition but is standing on a separate ticket in the election—a sign of deepening rifts in the government. Rajapakse and his brother, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, have patronised Sinhala-Buddhist extremist organisations such as Bodu Bala Sena and Sinhala Ravaya that are conducting a chauvinist anti-Muslim campaign.

The opposition Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is also contesting the election. The JVP is a Sinhala extremist party that supported Rajapakse's renewed war against the LTTE in 2006, voted for the government's war budgets and backed every anti-democratic measure against the Tamil masses.

The main opposition party in the North is the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a coalition of Tamil bourgeois parties. With the support of the US, India and other powers, the TNA is desperately seeking a power-sharing arrangement with Colombo. Its concern is to protect the economic and political interests of the Tamil bourgeoisie, not the democratic rights of the Tamil masses.

The TNA has put forward former Supreme Court Judge, C.V. Wigneswaran, as its candidate for provincial chief minister. Wigneswaran is part of the Colombo establishment and was not a TNA member until last month. The TNA leadership calculates that by fielding Wigneswaran it can distance itself from its previous support for the LTTE and present a figure acceptable to international powers and Colombo government.

The right-wing opposition United National Party (UNP), which was responsible for starting the island's civil war in 1983 and backed Rajapakse's renewed war, is also standing. The UNP is relying on the fervent support of the pseudo-lefts of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the United Socialist Party (USP). The purpose of this so-called "joint opposition" is to obscure the UNP's long record of abuse of democratic rights and pro-market restructuring.

The NSSP and USP are also assisting the TNA by promoting the dangerous illusion that US imperialism will defend the rights of the Tamil masses. These organisations back the TNA's call for the devolution of powers to provincial councils as the basis of a power-sharing arrangement between the Sinhala and Tamil ruling elites. Both groups are standing candidates in the Northern Province.

The SEP urges the working class to reject the manoeuvring of all factions of the ruling class and their pseudo-left apologists. While demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all troops from the North and East of the island, the SEP insists that the democratic rights of working people as a whole—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—can only be addressed as part of a unified struggle for a workers' and peasants' government to implement socialist policies.

In the coming weeks, SEP teams will campaign extensively among the workers, farmers and youth for the program of a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the broader fight for a United Socialist States of South Asia and internationally. We call on all those who support this program to actively participate in our campaign and above all to join and build the SEP as the revolutionary party needed for the struggles ahead. We also appeal for generous donations to the party's 500,000-rupee election fund.



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