

Sri Lankan SEP to contest provincial election

Socialist Equality Party
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka is standing candidates for Colombo District in the western provincial council election to be held on March 29. The government has called the southern provincial council election on the same date.

As required by the election laws, the SEP is fielding 43 candidates for the district. Our slate is headed by Vilani Peiris, a longstanding member of the party's political committee. Other SEP candidates include workers, youth and retirees who have a steadfast record of fighting for an international socialist perspective.

Six political parties, including the SEP, along with a host of independent groups, are standing candidates for Colombo District. In contrast to all these parties and groups, only the SEP is advancing a revolutionary program, based on international socialism, against imperialist militarism, the rising dangers of world war and the attacks of President Mahinda Rajapakse's government on living standards and democratic rights.

Asia has become a tinderbox of geopolitical tensions that threaten to drag the world into a devastating global conflict. Amid a deepening international economic crisis, US imperialism is seeking to undermine China's influence in the region in order to maintain American dominance and force open access to new markets and sources of profit. As part of its "pivot" to Asia, the Obama administration is encouraging Japan and other countries to aggressively pursue territorial disputes with China, while concentrating 60 percent of its military in the Indo-Pacific in preparation for war.

Sri Lanka has been drawn into the maelstrom. Yet the entire Colombo political establishment—government and opposition alike—is completely silent on the dangers of war arising from the US military build-up in Asia and its provocations against China.

The Obama administration is exploiting the war crimes committed by the Rajapakse government during its brutal civil war against the separatist Liberation

Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to pressure Colombo to distance itself from Beijing. The US actions are doubly cynical—not only is Washington responsible for its own war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, but it backed Colombo's war against the LTTE. The US is now threatening to sponsor a resolution in the UN Human Rights Council for an international inquiry that could potentially place Rajapakse in the dock for war crimes.

In the provincial elections, the government is denying all responsibility for war crimes and seeking to posture as "anti-imperialist" by portraying itself as the victim of an "international conspiracy." What a fraud! At the same time, Rajapakse is begging the US not to proceed with a UN resolution and hinting that he will wind back relations with China. If he did, the US would rapidly drop any concern about war crimes and the abuse of democratic rights in Sri Lanka.

The government, however, is heavily dependent on Chinese aid and investment. While Rajapakse claims the economy is strong, the country is reeling under the impact of the global economic turmoil and the government is hovering on the brink of bankruptcy. It is reliant on foreign loans, taken out at high interest rates, to meet previous loan repayments and manage its day-to-day expenses.

Under the whip of the International Monetary Fund, the government has already implemented far-reaching austerity measures and will be compelled to go much further. Just after the announcement of the elections, the government increased the price of powdered milk by close to 30 percent a kilogram—a sign of things to come. In Colombo, in a desperate bid to turn the capital into a global economic hub, the government is evicting 70,000 shanty dwellers to release land for development by local and foreign investors.

As the hostility and opposition of working people grows, Rajapakse is resorting to the stock-in-trade of the Colombo establishment, whipping up communalism

to divide the working class. The government is encouraging the chauvinist campaign of fascistic Buddhist-based organisations against Muslims and Christians, and continuing to foment anti-Tamil prejudice with claims that the LTTE has re-established itself. Rajapakse has indicated that he may call presidential elections early and is using the provincial elections as a testing ground for his campaign.

The opposition United National Party (UNP) has no fundamental differences with the government over its pro-market economic policies to attract foreign investment. The UNP is an openly big business party that in 1977 was one of the first in the world to initiate the process of opening up the country to foreign investors as a cheap labour platform.

The UNP has shown it is ready to shift into line with Washington against Beijing. UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has declared he would meet US and international demands for the full implementation of the recommendations of “Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission”—a body appointed by Rajapakse to whitewash the government’s war crimes.

The pseudo-left organisations—the Nava Sama Samaja Party and United Socialist Party—have lined up behind the right-wing UNP and its pro-US orientation. They cynically promote the UNP as a bulwark for democracy against the autocratic Rajapakse government, covering up the UNP’s long history of gross abuses of democratic rights. Likewise they back the Tamil National Alliance, the island’s main Tamil bourgeois party, which is seeking a power-sharing deal with Colombo to secure privileges for a small elite at the expense of working people.

The opposition Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is contesting the election with fraudulent claims it is the “people’s voice.” The JVP is based on anti-Tamil communalism and thoroughly integrated into the Colombo political establishment. During the 2005 presidential election, the JVP campaigned tirelessly to bring Rajapakse to power. Its claim to be building a “centre for struggle against the government” is precisely to prevent any independent movement by workers and the masses that would threaten bourgeois rule.

The SEP, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), has an unblemished record of fighting for socialist and

internationalist principles. Along with its sister parties in the ICFI, it is raising the necessity of building an anti-war movement of the international working class against the drive toward imperialist war.

The SEP and its forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), fought to mobilise the Sri Lankan working class against the civil war, demanding the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan military from the north and east. The SEP fights for a united struggle by Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers to bring to power a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as part of the struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally, to end war, racial discrimination and meet all the democratic and social rights of the working class and rural masses.

In the coming days, the SEP and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) will launch a determined campaign for this program. We urge workers, youth and other oppressed to give it your full support. The SEP has launched a 700,000-rupee fund for its election campaign and we call for generous donations.

The first SEP public meeting of the election will be held on February 12 at the Public Library Auditorium Hall in Colombo at 4 p.m. We invite workers and youth to attend and participate in the discussion on a socialist and internationalist perspective.



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