

SEP manifesto for the Western Provincial Council election

Vote for the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)!

Fight for a socialist program against war, austerity and police state methods!

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
22 February 2014

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is standing a slate of 43 candidates led by Political Committee member Vilani Peiris for the Colombo district in the Western Provincial Council election on March 29.

We urge workers and youth to support our campaign. The SEP is the only party that advances a socialist and internationalist program to mobilise Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers against the growing threat of war in Asia, the government's austerity measures and suppression of democratic rights.

To implement socialist policies and to address democratic rights, the SEP fights for a workers' and peasants' government in Sri Lanka as part of the struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally. This is the only viable means for defending the interests of workers, peasants and youth.

Like every other country, Sri Lanka is mired in a global crisis of capitalism not seen since the 1930s and is being drawn into the maelstrom of geo-political tensions and rivalry, provoked above all by US imperialism. The entire Colombo political establishment, including the pseudo-left organisations, is seeking to blind workers and youth to these perilous sea changes in world politics.

One hundred years after the outbreak of World War I, capitalism is again threatening to plunge humanity into another catastrophic global conflagration. The US "pivot to Asia" is aimed at isolating and encircling China militarily through alliances, strategic ties and basing agreements throughout the region, particularly with Japan, Australia and India.

The reckless and criminal policies of US imperialism, which has already waged wars of aggression against Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, are driven by the deepening global economic crisis and the US's own relative decline. Washington, acting on behalf of a rapacious financial oligarchy is determined to ensure its continued hegemony in Asia and thus the lion's share of the profits extracted from its vast reserves of cheap labour.

No country is immune. Washington is determined to force the Sri Lankan government to end its ties with Beijing. To this end, the US is planning to bring a third resolution at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) meeting in March for an investigation into the Sri Lankan military's atrocities during the war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The US has no concern for "human rights" in Sri Lanka or anywhere else. But if President Mahinda Rajapakse does not bow to US dictates on China, he could end up in the dock on war crimes charges.

Rajapakse's response to the US threat is a combination of empty

grandstanding and venal grovelling. He flatly denies any atrocities even occurred, despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary, and claims that he is the victim of an "international conspiracy." At the same time, Rajapakse goes cap in hand to the chief "conspirator," pleading his friendship with Washington. The government has hired a US lobbying firm which sent out a letter in January declaring that Colombo wishes "to make sure that relations with the United States are improved even more strongly" than China.

All the Sri Lankan opposition parties have lined up, in one way or another, with the US "human rights" charade and thus its war preparations against China. The pro-Western United National Party (UNP) accuses Rajapakse of "selling the country to China." The UNP, which began the country's communal war and is responsible for numerous atrocities, is calling for a "credible investigation" into human rights violations.

The pseudo-left organisations—the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and United Socialist Party (USP)—are in a de facto alliance with the right-wing UNP and are cheerleaders for the US "human rights" farce. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) has also jumped onto the bandwagon, calling for an international inquiry, as a means of securing greater privileges for the Tamil elites. Like the UNP, the Democratic Party formed by ex-army commander Sarath Fonseka advocates support for the US against China.

In opposition to all these parties, the SEP, along with its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), is fighting to mobilise the international working class in a unified anti-war movement aimed at abolishing the profit system—the root cause of imperialist war. World socialist revolution is the only viable strategy to halt the drive to war.

The SEP calls upon the workers and youth in Sri Lanka and throughout South Asia to join us in this fight. It is necessary to build an anti-war movement of the working class, independent of all factions of the bourgeoisie. We say: No support for the war criminals of the Rajapakse government! No support for Washington's bogus human rights charade!

Oppose the government's austerity drive

After the LTTE's defeat in 2009, Rajapakse announced a new "economic war," which is exactly what his government is carrying out against working people and the poor. International finance capital is demanding governments around the world impose the burden of the global economic crisis onto the working class by dismantling all its past social gains to pave the way for unfettered exploitation.

Facing a looming balance of payments crisis, Rajapakse is implementing

all the demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The government has systematically slashed the fiscal deficit from almost 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2009 to 5.8 percent in 2013, with a further reduction planned to 3.8 percent in 2016.

Rajapakse has given handouts and tax cuts to big business and the wealthy, which means the full weight of the austerity measures falls on working people. The government has imposed higher taxes, driven up prices by slashing subsidies and is making deep inroads into essential services such as free public health and education.

In Colombo city, the government is enacting its grandiose plan to turn the capital into a commercial hub for South Asia and a playground for wealthy tourists at the expense of the working class. More than 70,000 shanty dwellers are being forced out of their homes to make way for new roads, office towers, luxury hotels and condominiums in a desperate bid to attract international investors.

The social gulf between rich and poor is widening. The latest statistics show that the richest 20 percent of the population receives 53 percent of the national income, while the poorest 20 percent gets only 4.4 percent.

Fearing a social explosion, the government is preparing the police-state apparatus built up during decades of civil war for use against the working class. A recent posting on the army website displayed photos of soldiers and police commandos training to crush mass protests. "Riot control is an internal security measure launched to quell a sudden uprising and protests using minimum force," the website noted.

The meaning of "minimum force" is already clear. In May 2011, armed police fired on protesting Katunayaka free trade zone workers, killing one worker. In 2012, police commandoes killed one person during a rally by fishermen against increased fuel prices. Last August, the army shot dead three youth during a crackdown on a protest against the industrial pollution of Weliveriya's water supply.

At the same time, the Rajapakse government, like every government since independence in 1948, is attempting to shore up its rule by resorting to the reactionary means of whipping up communalism and nationalism to divide working people. Five years after the LTTE's military defeat, Rajapakse continues to stir up anti-Tamil sentiment by declaring that "LTTE terrorism" is re-emerging.

The government is also nurturing fascistic Buddhist organisations, such as Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force), Sihala Ravaya (Roar of Sinhalese) and Ravana Balakaya (Battalion of Ravana). These outfits operate like the Nazi stormtroopers in Germany in the 1930s, targetting and attacking Muslim businesses, mosques and Christian churches. In the future, these thugs will be turned on protesting workers and youth.

For the political independence of the working class

The working class cannot defend its basic rights without establishing its political independence from all factions of the bourgeoisie. The Colombo establishment as a whole is united in making the working people pay for the crisis of the profit system.

The UNP, the oldest bourgeois party in Sri Lanka, has a long record of acting in the interests of big business. It initiated the program of free-market restructuring in 1978 and relentlessly imposed this anti-working class agenda whenever it was in office. If the UNP comes to power, it will prosecute the Rajapakse government's assault on living standards more vigorously.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which helped Rajapakse into power in 2005 and backed his criminal war to the hilt, has all but shed its socialist pretensions and is presenting itself as a respectable capitalist party. It now postures as the advocate of clean, just, democratic, corruption-free capitalist rule.

The JVP's programmatic document, *Our Vision*, calls for "a modernised and industrialised country" under "new socialist policies." But when JVP talks about "socialism," it means the "China model"—in other words, a cheap labour platform for foreign investors. The JVP is offering a 5

percent tax break for big business to prove that it will do whatever it takes to make Sri Lanka "internationally competitive."

The pseudo-left NSSP and USP have formed an electoral alliance, but they function as nothing more than cheerleaders for UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe and a UNP government. The USP's petty criticisms of the UNP cannot hide the fact that it is shamelessly campaigning for a right-wing bourgeois party. Just over a decade ago, the opportunists of the NSSP and USP were denouncing the UNP to justify their support of Rajapakse's Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

The Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), a breakaway faction of the JVP, is not contesting this election, but is preparing a dangerous new political trap for the working class. It is seeking a regroupment with the NSSP, USP, various trade unions and other pseudo-left groups, along the lines of SYRIZA in Greece. The role of SYRIZA has been above all to prevent a political struggle by workers against the European Union that has insisted on draconian austerity measures and the Greek governments that have carried them out. The FSP is preparing to perform a similar function for the ruling class in Sri Lanka.

Support the SEP

In opposition to all these parties, the SEP is fighting for the international unity of the working class to abolish capitalism and establish a world-planned socialist economy that meets the pressing social needs of the majority, not the profits of the wealthy few. We call on workers and youth to reject all forms of nationalism and chauvinism, which, in Sri Lanka, produced a disastrous 26-year civil war.

Capitalism cannot be reformed to address the needs of workers, peasants and youth. That is why the SEP fights for a workers' and peasants' government in the form of a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the struggle for a Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally.

The SEP, the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI, is based on Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, which demonstrated the organic inability of the bourgeoisie, in countries of a belated capitalist development like Sri Lanka, to wage any struggle for democracy. That task falls to the working class as part of the fight for socialism.

The forerunner of the SEP, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), was established in 1968 in a political fight against the Lanka Sama Samaja Party's (LSSP) betrayal of the basic principles of socialist internationalism when it joined the capitalist coalition government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964.

The RCL/SEP is the only party that opposed the communal war by Colombo governments from the outset and demanded the withdrawal of troops from the North and East of the island. We have always warned that the war was not just directed against Tamils but the working class as a whole. The SEP has fought to unite workers, by opposing the Sinhala supremacism of Colombo governments, while also rejecting the LTTE's separatist perspective of a capitalist Tamil state.

Our party is based on the political and theoretical heritage of Leon Trotsky, Lenin's co-leader of the 1917 Russian revolution, who established the Fourth International in 1938 in a life-and-death struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy in order to resolve the historic crisis of the leadership of the working class.

We urge workers, youth and intellectuals to support our election campaign financially, attend our election meetings and join our campaign teams in Colombo. Above all, we call on you to carefully study our political perspective and program, and apply to join and build the SEP as the mass revolutionary party of the working class.



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