

Sri Lankan provincial election: Oppose the drive to war and austerity

The Socialist Equality Party
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The Sri Lankan government of President Mahinda Rajapakse has called elections for the Uva Provincial Council in the Central Hills district for September 20.

The entire political establishment—the ruling United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA), as well as the opposition United National Party (UNP) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—is engaged in a nationalist and chauvinist campaign to blind workers and youth to the dangers of war and social counter-revolution being driven by the breakdown of global capitalism.

None of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism that erupted 100 years ago in World War I and 75 years ago in World War II have been resolved.

Sri Lanka, like other countries, has been drawn into the geo-political maelstrom provoked by the US and the other imperialist powers. The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) warns that these tensions will inevitably lead to a third world war, this time with nuclear weapons, if the international working class does not intervene and fight for the revolutionary overthrow of world capitalism.

In Europe, the US and Germany are recklessly provoking a confrontation with Russia, having engineered the installation of a far-right regime in Ukraine through a fascist-led coup. Washington’s ultimate aim is the break-up of Russia and its reduction to a series of semi-colonies.

In Asia, the US is pursuing the same objective in relation to China. President Obama’s “pivot to Asia” is aimed at militarily encircling and undermining China through a military build-up and the strengthening of alliances and strategic partnerships across the Indo-Pacific, especially with Japanese and Australian imperialism.

In the Middle East, the US has backed Israel in its murderous war against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and is now ratcheting up a new war in Iraq and Syria. Any one of these flashpoints around the world could trigger a broader conflagration.

South Asia as a whole is caught up in these geo-political tensions. Pakistan is deeply enmeshed in the US-led war in Afghanistan and backs drone attacks on its own citizens, while attempting to retain ties with China. India has long abandoned its non-aligned status and is expanding its strategic partnership with the US, directed against China.

Rajapakse ridiculously tries to present the small island of Sri Lanka as being aloof from this world turmoil, while at the same time claiming his government is a victim of a “Western conspiracy.”

What is the conspiracy? The US and its allies, which backed Rajapakse’s war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and turned a blind eye to his war crimes, are now trying to use the latter to force him to break ties with China. Rajapakse never names the conspirators because, while leaning on China, he is desperately trying to curry favour with Washington.

Rajapakse’s manoeuvring was underscored by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s recent visit to Colombo. Their joint statement highlighted Sri Lanka’s importance to Washington and its allies, noting the “strategic geo-political location of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean sea lanes straddling Asia and Africa.” The two leaders agreed to establish a maritime security dialogue—a step toward closer naval relations.

Next week, Rajapakse will host Chinese President Xi Jinping and will no doubt seek to ease Chinese concerns about a shift by Colombo toward Washington and Tokyo that could compromise Chinese investments, including in the strategic Hambantota port.

However, Rajapakse’s precarious balancing act is becoming increasingly untenable. Washington’s impatience with Colombo is underscored by its support at the UN Human Rights Council for an international probe into Sri Lankan war crimes and human rights abuses—that could eventually see Sri Lanka leaders, including Rajapakse, put on trial.

For all his anti-Western rhetoric, Rajapakse is bent on mending relations with Washington. He is spending millions of dollars on US public relation firms to get a favourable hearing from Obama and the US Congress. His government has ditched its pro-Palestine posturing and issued a statement on Gaza blaming the Palestinian party Hamas for Israel’s war of aggression. At the time of the fascist-led coup in Ukraine, Rajapakse cautioned his external affairs minister about issuing a statement that could be interpreted as pro-Russian and anti-Western.

The Sri Lankan opposition parties are already in Washington’s camp. The right-wing UNP, which has long been a flunkey of US imperialism, calls on the government to heed the US demands on “human rights,” which in reality means distancing Sri Lanka from China. The JVP, the most vociferous backer of the war against the LTTE, now blames the government for paving the way for the UN probe by violating human rights. In this way, the JVP, previously known for its anti-imperialist demagoguery, is signaling that it is in tune with Washington.

The pseudo-left organisations—the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and United Socialist Party (USP)—are unabashed in their

support for the US human rights charade, presenting it as the means for establishing “democratic rights” in Sri Lanka. At the same time, like their international counterparts, they are trying to chloroform the working class by declaring that there is no threat of world war and that global peace will reign under imperialism.

Workers and youth in Sri Lanka must oppose the drive to imperialist war as part of constructing a global anti-war movement of the working class. Such a movement will be built only in opposition to all the factions of the capitalist class. This includes in Russia and China, where the regimes represent the interests of the wealthy oligarchs who enriched themselves through the processes of capitalist restoration. World socialist revolution is the only means for preventing war and the International Committee of the Fourth International is the only organisation fighting for this perspective.

Within this region, the SEP calls on workers to unite around the struggle for a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia, and, on this island, for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic.

The drive to war is accompanied by a deepening assault on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class in every country. The global capitalist crisis that erupted in 2008 is fuelling demands from the parasitic financial aristocracies for a continuous social counter-revolution in the US, Europe and in every corner of the globe, including Sri Lanka.

Since 2009, the Rajapakse government has implemented International Monetary Fund demands to slash budget deficits—the target for this year is 5.2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 3.8 percent for next year. The result is a never-ending attack on education, health and welfare services, and the slashing of price subsidies. At the same time, the government maintains a huge military/police apparatus, directed above all at the working class.

Rajapakse is deeply fearful about growing signs of social unrest. More than 50,000 health workers recently took strike action, which was only halted by the treachery of the trade unions. Protests among university students are continuing.

As part of its plans to transform Colombo into a commercial hub, the government is driving out 100,000 families and has already used the military to enforce evictions. Rajapakse is desperate to attract investment to bail out the economy, which is burdened with unsustainable debt. Sri Lanka’s external debt is 59 percent of GDP, the highest in Asia, after Mongolia and Papua New Guinea.

The Uva districts of Badulla and Moneragala symbolise the social crisis facing working people. Around 15 percent of the population lives below the poverty line of less than \$US1 a day and more than 30 percent exists on less than \$2 a day. Most Badulla residents are poor Tamil plantation workers and in Moneragala poverty-stricken peasants.

Incapable of seriously addressing this social crisis, Rajapakse’s ruling party resorts to thuggery against its political opponents and the illegal use of public money to pay for its campaign. So widespread is the violence that the election commissioner has warned that he could be forced to postpone the election.

The opposition UNP and JVP share the same pro-market perspective as the government. UNP politicians shed crocodile tears at their election meetings about the economic hardship facing working people, but in office, this party of the corporate elite was

notorious for its attacks on living standards. As for the JVP, it has abandoned its previous socialistic rhetoric and now declares that its objective is to woo foreign capital to the island.

The Ceylon Workers’ Congress (CWC), which is part of Rajapakse’s ruling coalition, and other Tamil parties promote the fraud that electing “Tamil representatives” will help plantation workers. All of them foment Tamil communal politics to divide Tamil and Sinhala workers, and have been responsible for imposing the slashing of wages and conditions demanded by the plantation corporations.

One of the pseudo-left groups, the USP, is contesting the Moneragala district but has issued no public statement or policies. Its silence is not surprising. Along with the NSSP, the USP is part of an alliance with the UNP, promoting the fraud that this right-wing, pro-business party is a defender of democratic rights. The chief function of the NSSP and USP on behalf of the ruling class is to prevent any independent movement of the working class based on socialist internationalism.

While it is not contesting the provincial election, the SEP is actively campaigning against war and social counter-revolution. We appeal to workers, youth and the rural poor to join the SEP and build it as a mass revolutionary party to overthrow capitalism and bring to power a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement socialist policies. The SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have organised a series of meetings to explain, and oppose, the drive to war. We urge you to read the *World Socialist Web Site*, study our program and perspectives and apply to join the SEP and IYSSE.



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