Sri Lankan SEP to contest presidential election

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), will contest the presidential election scheduled to be held on January 8, 2015. Our candidate is Pani Wijesiriwardena, an SEP Political Committee member and retired teacher with a long and principled history of struggle for the interests of the working class.

The purpose of the SEP's intervention in the election is to build an independent political movement of the working class and the oppressed, based on the program of international socialism, against the growing danger of world war and the attacks on living conditions and democratic rights.

The SEP is the only party fighting in this election for socialism and the interests of the working class against all the parties of the bourgeoisie and their pseudo-left hangers-on, such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party and the United Socialist Party, which have a long history of functioning as the defenders and apologists for one or other capitalist party.

President Mahinda Rajapakse called the election two years early, fearing a further erosion of his support if it were delayed. Widespread popular anger is developing rapidly among sections of workers, rural poor and youth over the government's austerity measures, dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The January 8 election is being conducted in a highly-charged political atmosphere. With the US intensifying its "pivot to Asia" and military preparations against China, sections of the Colombo ruling elite are advocating closer relations with Washington and a break with the ties built up by Rajapakse with Beijing.

Just one day after the election was announced, Health Minister Maithripala Sirisena resigned and said he would stand against Rajapakse as the "opposition common candidate." Sirisena, who was also secretary of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), was joined by several other ministers and parliamentarians. The move was obviously orchestrated well in advance with the opposition United National Party (UNP) to maximise the turmoil in the government's ranks and encourage further defections.

Sirisena, who up until last week defended the government's record, immediately denounced the country's "veiled dictatorship," declaring that "corruption, fraud and injustice are rampant." His statement is completely in line with Washington's bogus "human rights" campaign aimed at pressuring Colombo to break its ties with Beijing. Evidence is already emerging of US involvement, with former President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is active in the US-based Clinton Foundation, playing a central role in Sirisena's sudden emergence as a presidential challenger.

The political crisis in Colombo graphically demonstrates that every part of the globe is being caught up in the imperialist machinations and war drive being fuelled by the worsening economic breakdown following the 2008 global financial crisis. The SEP and its sister parties of the ICFI are fighting to construct an anti-war movement of the international working class to overthrow the profit system, which is the root cause of war, and establish a world planned socialist economy.

South Asia as a whole is embroiled in the geo-political maelstrom being generated by the US "pivot," which is part of Washington's broader ambitions to subjugate the Eurasian landmass. Over the past year, the US has recklessly engineered a confrontation with Russia over Ukraine and unleashed a new war in the Middle East, as well as intensifying its provocations against China in Asia.

The decade-long US occupation of Afghanistan has not only created an interminable civil war in that country, but generated an intractable economic and political crisis in neighbouring Pakistan. In India, the newly-elected Prime

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Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party have shifted India into an even closer embrace with the US and its two imperialist allies, Japan and Australia, further heightening the danger of war.

The entire Sri Lankan political establishment—the government, opposition parties and various pseudo-left organisations—have deliberately kept workers and youth in the dark about the threat of war. The SEP will utilise its election campaign to break this conspiracy of silence and to mobilise the working class against war and austerity, which is the agenda of all these parties.

In Sri Lanka, the US has seized on the war crimes of the Sri Lankan military as it crushed the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to threaten Rajapakse with an international inquiry that could lead to sanctions and charges. The aim of Washington, which backed the war against the LTTE to the hilt, is to force the government to distance itself from Beijing and line up with the "pivot."

The response of the government and opposition is equally bogus. Rajapakse postures as a victim of an "international conspiracy" but never names the conspirators and is spending millions of dollars hiring American lobbyists to try to ingratiate his government in Washington. At the same time, the government is intensifying its whipping up of communalism and further consolidating police-state measures to suppress any opposition in the working class to its deep attacks on living standards.

Sirisena and the UNP denounce the government's autocratic methods but would be just as ruthless as Rajapakse in imposing the IMF's austerity dictates on the working class. The UNP led one of the first governments in the world to implement pro-market policies. It has a long history of strike-breaking and brutal police repression against the working class. The UNP instigated the communal pogroms in 1983 that started the civil war. Sirisena's appeal for "democracy" is simply to signal that he would place Sri Lanka firmly on the side of the US and its "pivot" against China.

The opposition Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which long ago abandoned its "anti-imperialist" posturing, is lining up behind the "common opposition candidate"—and thus with US imperialism. Widely discredited for its previous support for Rajapakse and his brutal war, the JVP has decided not to stand its own presidential candidate. While not openly supporting Sirisena, it has nevertheless signaled where it stands by declaring that the main aim must be to "defeat Rajapakse's dictatorial rule."

The SEP has an unblemished record of fighting for socialist and internationalist principles. The SEP and its forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), fought to mobilise the working class and the oppressed against the civil war, demanding the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan military from the war zones of the north and east. The SEP fights to unite Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers in a unified struggle to establish a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as part of the fight for socialism in South Asia and internationally, to meet all the democratic and social rights of the working class and rural masses.

The SEP candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena has spent his entire adult life as a dedicated fighter for the perspective of international socialism. Among teachers and his many former students, he is widely recognised as an indefatigable defender of their rights and those of other sections of workers and the poor, and a principled opponent of the trade union apparatus and its betrayals. As well as being a Political Committee member, he serves on the Colombo editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The SEP and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), will issue a detailed election manifesto setting out the party's policies and will hold public meetings around the country. We urge workers, rural poor and youth, whether Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim, to fully support and energetically participate in our campaign.

The SEP has launched a 600,000-rupee fund for its election campaign and we call for generous donations. Above all, we urge all those who agree with our program and perspectives to join the SEP to build it as the mass revolutionary party of the working class.

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