

The outcome of the Sri Lankan election and its international implications

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The outcome of the Sri Lankan election last Thursday, with Maithripala Sirisena ousting Mahinda Rajapakse as president, has ominous implications for the working class, not only in Sri Lanka and South Asia but throughout the world.

Firstly, it demonstrates the relentless drive by US imperialism to draw every country in Asia into its diplomatic, economic and military confrontation with China and preparations for war. Secondly, it underscores the political role of the pseudo-left tendencies in directly facilitating the agenda of the imperialist powers under the fraudulent banners of “democracy” and “human rights.”

What has unfolded since Sirisena deserted Rajapakse’s government and was endorsed as the joint opposition candidate by the right-wing United National Party (UNP) and a range of other political tendencies is a US-sponsored regime-change operation. It was publicly orchestrated in large part by former President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who has close ties with the Obama administration and US foreign policy establishment through the Clinton Foundation.

Rajapakse’s crime from the standpoint of Washington was not the mass murder of Tamil civilians during the civil war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but the relations his government developed with China. He took billions of dollars in investment from Chinese state corporations and, in defiance of US and Indian protests, began assisting Chinese ambitions to increase its naval presence in the Indian Ocean by granting its submarines and warships access to Sri Lankan ports.

The behind-the-scenes machinations by the US to oust Rajapakse were made apparent on election day. Secretary of State John Kerry called Rajapakse to instruct him to keep the voting “free from violence and

intimidation” and “ensure a peaceful handover of power” if he lost. The message to the Sri Lankan state apparatus and military was unmistakable. Any attempt to prevent Sirisena’s victory would be met with an imperialist intervention.

US President Barack Obama issued a statement last Friday welcoming the successful regime change. “The United States,” he asserted, “looks forward to ... working with President Sirisena to advance peace, democracy, and prosperity for all Sri Lankans.”

The last thing the Sri Lankan working class and oppressed will gain from Sirisena’s installation is peace, democracy and prosperity. The country will be turned into another arena of US intrigue against China. Under conditions of worsening global economic slump, the repressive laws imposed during the 26-year civil war and expanded by Rajapakse will be retained and used to enforce ever-deeper attacks on living standards.

As he was sworn in as president, Sirisena indicated his readiness to align with Washington’s agenda. He vowed to “change the foreign policy to build friendly relations with all countries of the world.” In the context of the US pivot, this means a turn away from Beijing and toward Washington and its key allies in the region—Japan, Australia and India.

The US intervention follows similar operations in Asia and internationally. In 2010, Washington had a hand in the removal of Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, due to their advocacy of conciliation with China rather than confrontation. Both countries are now at the forefront of the US-led preparations for war. The military junta in Burma was brought into line with the US via threats and financial incentives, leading to the suspension of Chinese investments and the downplaying of military relations.

Last February, the US, with Germany's support, incited a fascist-led coup in Ukraine to install a pro-imperialist puppet government. The coup was aimed at provoking a conflict with Russia, with the ultimate aim of fashioning a compliant regime in Moscow as well. The drive to neutralise Russia, China's most obvious potential military ally, is inseparable from the pivot. The US will not allow even the possibility that China could develop alliances and geopolitical influences that would enable it to challenge American dominance over Asia, and undermine Washington's global hegemony.

The outcome of the Sri Lankan election will only compound the assessment of the Chinese government and military that it is under siege on all fronts, and heighten the danger that minor incidents could spark all-out war.

The pseudo-left Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), the United Socialist Party (USP) and the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) share political responsibility for the US regime-change operation. As in the Ukraine, where the international pseudo-left proclaimed an imperialist conspiracy to be a "democratic revolution," in Sri Lanka they portrayed Sirisena as the candidate of "democracy" against Rajapakse's "dictatorship."

While all three parties stood their own candidates for president, they remained mute on Sirisena's pro-US agenda and raised only mild criticisms of his political history. No less than Rajapakse, Sirisena is responsible for the crimes committed during the civil war and the brutal assault on the social conditions and democratic rights of the working class.

The pseudo-left groups nevertheless joined with the Tamil and Muslim elites to sow illusions that the persecution suffered by the Tamil and Muslim minorities would be redressed under a Sirisena presidency. Along with the unions, they promoted false claims that action would be taken to improve the living standards of the working class and rural poor. These petty-bourgeois forces helped channel the genuine popular anger against the Rajapakse government, among working people, youth and the oppressed masses, behind Sirisena and the pro-imperialist right-wing parties that backed him.

The extent to which the pseudo-lefts are prepared to go in aligning with US imperialism can be seen in their characterisation of China as an "imperialist power" seeking to "colonise" Sri Lanka. Turning reality inside

out, they equate China, which functions as a cheap labour platform for international capital, with the United States, the centre of international finance, and then denounce Chinese "expansionism" and "aggression"—in line with Washington's agenda.

Herein lies the significance of the election campaign of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), which ran its own candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena based on the perspective of international socialism. The SEP alone sought to alert the working class and oppressed to the growing dangers of war and advanced a program to fight the social counter-revolution being waged on living standards and democratic rights. It fought for the political independence of the working class from all factions of the bourgeoisie, including both the Sirisena and Rajapakse camps and the pseudo-left tendencies.

The critical question in the period ahead is the development of socialist and internationalist consciousness in the working class and the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution, across Asia and internationally. That is the only basis upon which a powerful international anti-war movement can be developed to end the source of war and imperialist oppression—capitalism and the nation-state system in which it is rooted.



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