

Sri Lankan general election 2015

Vote for the Socialist Equality Party!

For a socialist program against war, austerity and to defend democratic rights! For a workers and peasants government!

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
15 August 2015

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls on workers, youth and rural toilers to vote for our candidates in Monday's general election to show support for a socialist alternative in opposition to the major capitalist parties—both the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)—and all their various allies.

The SEP is standing 43 candidates in three of the country's 22 electoral districts—Colombo, Jaffna and Nuwara Eliya. Longstanding SEP leaders—Vilani Peiris, Paramu Thirugnanasampanthar and M. Thevarajah—head the three slates. The SEP's official electoral symbol is a pair of scissors.

The SEP is the only party that defends the interests of the working class and advances the program of socialist internationalism to fight against the growing danger of war and the deepening attacks on the living conditions and democratic rights of working people.

The election campaign has been dominated by lies and bitter infighting. Both the UNP-led United National Front for Good Governance and the SLFP-led United People's Freedom Alliance are gushing election promises that they have no intention of keeping.

The ongoing international breakdown of the capitalist system following the 2008 global financial crisis has produced an enormous crisis in Sri Lanka. The economy is reeling under huge foreign debts and the near financial bankruptcy of the government. The ruthless austerity measures being imposed on the Greek population by the European and international banks are a warning of what is in store for workers in every country, including Sri Lanka.

The UNP and SLFP are vying for office, not to establish democracy or improve the living conditions of workers and the poor, but to implement the austerity agenda being dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The vicious factional conflict in the Sri Lankan ruling elite between the UNP and SLFP is being driven by sharpening geo-political tensions—above all, the drive by US imperialism to ensure its global domination against all potential rivals. As part of its “pivot to Asia” against China, the US has recklessly inflamed flashpoints that could trigger war between nuclear-armed powers.

Over the past five years, Washington has engaged in a relentless drive throughout the region to strengthen alliances and undermine Chinese influence. The ousting of Mahinda Rajapakse and the installation of Maithripala Sirisena as Sri Lankan president in the January election was just the latest in a series of “regime changes” to ensure full support for the US.

Washington's chief accomplices in Colombo were UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, who is now prime minister, and former President Chandrika Kumaratunga. They represent sections of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie who feared Rajapakse's close ties with Beijing could result in US reprisals as it prepares war against China. Under Sirisena and the UNP, Sri Lankan foreign policy has swung back toward the US and India.

The election is being followed closely in Washington and New Delhi. Indian analyst Brahma Challeaney wrote: “Sri Lanka's parliamentary election on Monday promises to shape not only the country's political future, but also geopolitics in the wider Indian Ocean region.” He highlighted Sri Lanka's “strategic importance”—located at the crossroads of key shipping routes across the Indian Ocean—and expressed concern that China would gain if Rajapakse returned to power in this election as prime minister.

Having carried out a regime change, the US is not about to let Rajapakse return to power. The writing is already on the wall as to the anti-democratic methods that will be used to block Rajapakse. Sirisena, who was promoted in the January election as a great democrat, declared again this week that he will not appoint Rajapakse as prime minister, even if the SLFP wins—a move that could be enforced only by using the state apparatus and security forces.

For his part, Rajapakse is whipping up reactionary anti-Tamil communalism and accusing the UNP of threatening the military defeat inflicted on the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009. He is backed by sections of the ruling class that have benefitted from substantial Chinese aid and investment in Sri Lanka.

Inexorably, Sri Lanka and the entire region are being drawn into the maelstrom of geo-political rivalries that are threatening to engulf the world in war. All the major imperialist powers—the US,

Japan and the European powers—are seeking to stake out their claims and will not hesitate to use military force if needed.

The drive to war is a product of the fundamental contradictions of the world capitalist system between world economy and the outmoded nation state system. The only social force that can prevent war is the international working class, by abolishing the profit system through socialist revolution.

The SEP's campaign is an integral part of the struggle being waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its sections to build an international anti-war movement of the working class. Our fight to unite workers in Sri Lanka and the region is expressed in our call for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as part of a United Socialist States of South Asia and the world.

Every other party in Sri Lanka is lined up in one way or another behind the two capitalist factions.

- The Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has aligned with the UNP. It publicly supported Sirisena's declaration that he would not appoint Rajapakse as prime minister. The JVP formed part of the top advisory body—the National Executive Council (NEC)—appointed by Sirisena and Wickremesinghe to bolster support for the UNP government.

- The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which represents the island's Tamil elites, backed the regime change in January and has indicated its support for the UNP. It also had a representative on the NEC. The TNA is hoping that, with the support of the US and India, it can strike a deal with a UNP government for a power-sharing arrangement whereby the Sinhala and Tamil elites can jointly exploit the working class.

- The pseudo-left organisations are all lining up, directly or indirectly, with the UNP. The Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), whose leader was an NEC member, is campaigning for a UNP-led government. The United Socialist Party (USP) and Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) proclaim they are against both major parties while directing their main fire against the “dictatorial” Rajapakse. They thus encourage more sceptical voters to cast their ballot for the UNP as the “lesser evil.”

- A host of upper middle class academic and professional associations, non-government organisations and trade unions, including the National Movement for Social Justice, Power of Citizens, the Collective of Trade Unions for Social Justice, have signed an electoral pact with the UNP. They falsely hail the UNP as the democratic alternative to the SLFP. These groups, together with the pseudo-left organisations, form the basis of a “colour revolution” in waiting should Washington decide on such a course in order to block a Rajapakse win.

The SEP calls on workers and youth to reject both the UNP and SLFP along with all their political allies, apologists and hangers-on. These two parties have dominated Sri Lankan politics since formal independence in 1948. They have brought one disaster after another for working people. Both parties are thoroughly mired in Sinhala communalism and bear responsibility for a quarter century of civil war that devastated the island and cost the lives of hundreds of thousands.

Whichever party wins the election, the next government will implement the devastating austerity measures demanded by the

IMF and use the police-state apparatus built up during decades of war to suppress the opposition of working people.

Both parties are responsible for terrible crimes against the working class and poor. An SLFP-led government ruthlessly crushed the 1971 JVP uprising and slaughtered 15,000 rural youth. In the late 1980s, having used the JVP against the working class, the UNP turned on its de facto ally and unleashed its death squads, killing an estimated 60,000 people.

Successive UNP and SLFP governments are responsible for torture, abductions and the indiscriminate killing of civilians during the war against the LTTE. Both parties support the continued military occupation of the North and East of the country and the suppression of the democratic rights of Tamils.

The SEP fights for a revolutionary socialist program to address all social and democratic questions. We call on workers to reject the communal divisions fuelled by the ruling class and to unite across the ethnic divide of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim to fight for socialist policies and the abolition of capitalism. Ending communal discrimination and establishing the democratic rights of Tamils and Muslims can be achieved only in the struggle for socialism.

The defence of social rights, such as education, health and housing, cannot be secured under decaying capitalism. The rights of small farmers and fishermen are subjected to constant attack under this system. Only by nationalising the big banks, estates and industries and repudiating foreign loans can these attacks be halted and the preparation of the foundations of a socialist society begun.

In a world dominated by international corporations and finance capital, the struggle for socialism is necessarily international in scope. The SEP fights for a workers' and peasants' government and a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

We call on workers and youth to vote for the SEP in this election in Colombo, Jaffna and Nuwara Eliya to show your support for the struggle for socialism.

Study our program and apply to join our party, the SEP and our youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), to build the necessary revolutionary leadership for the class struggles ahead.



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