

# The significance of the SEP's vote in Sri Lankan elections

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The votes received by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lankan general elections on Monday, indicate a turn by an advanced section of workers and the oppressed masses towards the perspective of international socialism. The SEP ran 43 candidates in three of the country's 22 electoral districts—the capital Colombo, Jaffna in the war-ravaged Northern Province and Nuwara Eliya in the central tea plantation region.

The SEP polled 321 votes—125 in Colombo, 142 in Jaffna and 54 in Nuwara Eliya. Though small, this was a conscious vote for the SEP's principled campaign against imperialist war and austerity and for a workers' and peasants' government and socialist policies. The SEP received votes in all electoral divisions of each district indicating that the party has struck roots among working people in all those areas.

Voters were confronted with 6,151 candidates from 21 political parties and 201 independent groups in August 17 elections. All of them, except the SEP and its candidates, ran on a platform of defending capitalist rule. The SEP's votes were won in a campaign to cut through the political confusion generated by the mass of candidates and parties, as well as the establishment media, and to mobilise the working class, in alliance with the oppressed masses, in a revolutionary struggle to abolish capitalist rule.

The SEP issued an election announcement on July 13, followed by a detailed election manifesto, and distributed thousands of copies in Sinhala and Tamil in three electoral districts and other parts of the island. In addition, dozens of articles were published on the *World Socialist Web Site* analysing political developments in the course of the campaign, differentiating from every other party and advancing the SEP's policies.

In the course of just over a month, the party held 10

public meetings in the three electoral districts addressed by leading SEP candidates and SEP General Secretary Wije Dias. Supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in France held a well-attended public meeting in Paris on August 15, which was addressed via the Internet by Dias and two SEP candidates, who discussed the international significance of the party's election campaign.

The SEP alone explained that the bitter rivalry between the two main bourgeois parties—the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)—was bound up with rising geo-political tensions. The ouster of Mahinda Rajapakse as president and installation of Maithripala Sirisena in the January presidential election was a regime-change operation backed by Washington as part of its “pivot to Asia” against China. The US hostility to Rajapakse as a result of his government's close ties with Beijing.

The SEP warned that Sri Lanka, due to its strategic position astride the Indian Ocean's shipping lanes, was being swept up in the US preparations for war against China. We insisted that the only social force capable of halting the slide to war was the international working class through the struggle to abolish capitalism and the outmoded nation state system.

As part of the campaign being waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International, our candidates sought to educate workers and young people on the need to build an international anti-war movement of the working class. The SEP intransigently opposes all forms of nationalism and communalism and seeks to unite workers in the fight for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of a Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally.

The SEP also exposed the shameless lies by the UNP and SLFP and their allies that they would bring

democracy, justice and economic well-being if voted into power. Our candidates warned workers that the deepening crisis of world capitalism, signaled above all by the savage austerity measures being meted out to the Greek working class, meant deep inroads into living conditions in every country. Whichever parties formed the next government would ruthlessly implement the austerity agenda of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and use police-state measures suppress the resistance of working people.

The SEP's election campaign sought to clarify the role of the pseudo-left organisations—the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the United Socialist Party—in supporting the US-engineered ouster of Rajapakse as president in January. It drew attention to the lessons of Syriza's betrayal in Greece where the pseudo-left in power had broken its promises to oppose austerity, ignored the overwhelming “no” vote in last month's referendum and proceeded to implement the far-reaching austerity demands of European and international finance capital.

While running candidates for five districts, the NSSP's efforts were openly directed at ensuring the victory of UNP in the name of defending the so-called January “democratic revolution” that removed the “fascist Rajapakse regime.” In covering up the long history of attacks by UNP governments on the social and democratic rights of working people, the NSSP sought to hoodwink voters into believing the UNP's lies about bringing “democracy” and “good governance” to Sri Lanka.

The United Socialist Party (USP) and Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) postured as opponents of both the UNP and SLFP, but the main thrust of their criticisms was aimed against Rajapakse and the SLFP. In effect, they presented the UNP as the “lesser evil” thus indirectly encouraging more skeptical voters to cast a ballot for the UNP.

In response to a WSWS article exposing its previous open alignments with the UNP, the USP responded with a vitriolic diatribe denouncing the SEP's “lies and slanders.” The SEP responded in a lengthy reply exposing the USP's history of opportunism in lining up with both the UNP and SLFP, and establishing the SEP's principled record of struggle for the political independence of the working class from all factions of the bourgeoisie.

The SEP thanks all those who assisted our campaign as well as the workers, young people and rural toilers who voted for our party to show their support for our program of socialist internationalism. In the wake of the election, major struggles are looming as the UNP-led government enmeshes Sri Lanka in US war plans and intensifies the assault on the living standards of working people. We appeal to workers and youth to seriously study the SEP's program, regularly read the WSWS and apply to join and build the SEP as the revolutionary leadership of the working class needed for the political fight ahead.



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