

Britain's *Financial Times* hails Sri Lankan election result

Wasantha Rupasinghe
26 August 2015

The *Financial Times* (FT), the pre-eminent mouthpiece of British finance capital, wrote an editorial on Sunday hailing the outcome of the Sri Lankan general election on August 17. Though the US and Western press, including the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* welcomed the result, the FT was far more unabashed in its praise and more explicit in the agenda that the US and its allies expect from the new United National Party (UNP)-led government.

The thrust of the editorial was summed up in its headline: “Sri Lanka says good riddance to Rajapakse”—a reference to former President Mahinda Rajapakse who was making a bid for prime minister via the election. “Sri Lankan voters have dealt a decisive blow to comeback ambitions of former President Mahinda Rajapakse, who ran the island of 20m people in authoritarian style for a decade. It also opens up the possibility of the former strongman being investigated for both corruption and human rights violations,” the newspaper enthused.

The FT's response has nothing to do with concern for the democratic rights of Sri Lankans. Rather as the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) alone explained in the election, the hostility to Rajapakse in the US and its allies, including Britain, was because of his close ties with China. Washington, with the assistance of former President Chandrika Kumaratunga and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, engineered Rajapakse's ouster as president in the January presidential election.

The applause in the FT's editorial offices was precisely because the US-backed regime-change operation that began in January with the election of President Maithripala Sirisena has been completed with the UNP's election victory. Wickremesinghe, who headed a minority UNP government from January, can now claim an electoral mandate.

The FT editorial very clearly sets out three major issues that Sirisena and Wickremesinghe have to address on behalf of the major powers, including Britain, the island's former colonial ruler.

The first is to urgently reach “a political settlement with the minority Tamils in the North and East.” The editorial continued: “They [Tamils] must be convinced that the Sinhalese chauvinism practiced by Mr. Rajapakse is over. Power is already devolved to some extent, but this may have to go further. Any settlement must also involve a credible inquiry into the final months of civil war in 2009 when the government launched a crushing offensive against the Tamil Tigers [LTTE].”

What cynicism! The sham concern for the plight of the island's Tamils is completely at odds with the political and military support given by the US, the EU and India to the Rajapakse government as it carried out its criminal war to ensure Sinhala supremacy. The phony banner of “human rights” only began to be raised as it became apparent that the LTTE would be defeated and thoughts turned to gaining political influence in Colombo.

The FT's primary concern in pushing for a “political settlement” with the Tamil minority is to secure a power-sharing arrangement between the Tamil and Sinhala elites that will transform the island into a major cheap labour platform for foreign investors and a strategic base for US and British imperialism. It is also aimed at preventing political unrest among Tamils in southern India and cementing India's role in South Asia.

The FT is far blunter about its second demand—“to tweak foreign policy.” It stated: “Colombo had become too close to Beijing, which spent lavishly on infrastructure, including roads and ports. That made

Delhi nervous. It saw Sri Lanka as being co-opted into a Chinese strategy of encircling India, a fear that was exacerbated when Chinese submarines twice docked in Colombo harbour.”

The FT wants more than “a tweak” and certainly does not want a “balanced foreign policy.” It was not just New Delhi but Washington that was deeply opposed to Rajapakse’s ties with Beijing. The US and its allies want to transform the island, which is strategically located adjacent to key shipping lanes across the Indian Ocean, firmly within Washington’s camp as part of its “pivot to Asia” against China. Far from “China encircling India,” the US is engaged in a comprehensive strategy of encircling China throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Over the past seven months, a string of top US officials, including Secretary of State John Kerry visited Colombo. There is every sign that the foreign policy “tweak” to the US will accelerate with the visit to Sri Lanka yesterday—one week after the election—of Nisha Biswal, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia.

The third item on the FT’s agenda is the demand for far-reaching pro-market “reform,” as pushed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to open the island up for foreign investment.

“Although it [Sri Lanka] has been growing fast, much of this has been turbocharged with debt. Some efforts have been made to rein in fiscal deficits, but tax revenue remains too low,” the editorial declared. The meaning is clear. The debt burden must be unloaded onto the backs of workers and the poor by slashing government expenditure and increasing taxes on essentials such as food.

The FT also pressed the new government to “work harder to cut the red tape that still puts off foreign investors,” adding: “If Sri Lanka were an easier to place to do business, it could rapidly develop as a regional centre for manufacturing and service exports.” Making the island more business friendly will mean more financial incentives for investors, a wholesale assault on the wages and conditions of workers and the scrapping of already limited labour laws.

As the saying goes, by their friends you shall know them. The *Financial Times* editorial is a damning indictment of the Sri Lankan pseudo-left organisations, including the Nava Sama Samaja Party and the United

Socialist Party that directly or indirectly backed the pro-US UNP in the election. They are exposed as pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist outfits that have helped install a government that will unleash a devastating assault on the democratic rights and social conditions of working people in Sri Lanka.



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