# Sri Lankan workers need a socialist program to defeat Colombo's police-state preparations

**The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)**
**12 June 2019**

A political war has erupted between the various factions of Sri Lanka's ruling elite and the three main pillars of government—the legislature, executive and the judiciary—since the Easter Sunday terrorist bombings on April 21.

The suicide attacks, which killed almost 300 people and injured over 500, were directed by the ISIS, in coordination with the local Muslim fundamentalist National Thowheeth Jamma'ath (NTJ) group.

Evidence presented at the ongoing Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) investigation into the bombings has revealed that the atrocity was allowed to occur with the full knowledge of the political leaders and the relevant security establishment.

Last Friday, President Maithripala Sirisena summoned an emergency cabinet meeting to demand an immediate halt to the PSC investigation and angrily declared that the investigation was aimed at discrediting him.

Sirisena also claimed that the parliamentary inquiry was jeopardising national security and constituted sub judice in respect to court cases already filed on the terror attacks. He then threatened to boycott all government activities, including cabinet meetings, and said he would work alone.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and cabinet ministers rejected Sirisena's accusations. The Office of the Parliamentary Speaker issued a press release which stated: "The decision to allow press coverage was taken by parliament itself, which appointed the PSC under Standing Orders. Parliament has the power and authority to decide."

Another faction of the ruling elite, headed by opposition leader and former President Mahinda Rajapakse, opposed the PSC and accused it of publicly divulging vital national security information.

The "national security" concerns of Sri Lanka's rival factions and the security apparatus are not about stopping terrorism, but defending their "right" to conspire against the working class and the oppressed masses. Sirisena, Wickremesinghe and Rajapakse are desperately blaming each other, fearful that their own culpability for the terror attacks will be publicly exposed.

Evidence has emerged that top defence establishment officers were warned in advance of the attacks and given details by an Indian intelligence agency. Sirisena, Wickremesinghe and others were also briefed about the impending bombings but allowed them to happen in order to advanced their own reactionary agendas. The situation, however, has boomeranged, aggravating the political crisis more acutely than any of them expected.

An editorial in last weekend's *Sunday Times* declared that the "revelations made by the former defence secretary, the former inspector general of police and the chief of National Intelligence in the PSC over the past few days have shaken the country to its core. It raises questions of trust and confidence in the system; and the ability and capacity—or lack thereof—of the custodians of power and public security to guarantee the safety of the citizens."

As its history has demonstrated, Sri Lanka's ruling class will do anything—at home and abroad—to defend capitalist rule. Insurgent workers in Sri Lanka were shot in the mass strikes and protests in 1953 known as the Hartal. Tens of thousands of Tamil civilians were killed in Colombo's almost 30-year war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the north and east, and an estimated 60,000 Sinhala rural youth were murdered by the military in 1988–1990 in the south of the island.

The Sri Lankan political establishment enthusiastically backed the US-led "war on terror" and its invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, which cost millions of lives and were launched to dominate the oil-rich Middle East and Central Asia.

Irrespective of their tactical differences, all factions of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie are united in the use of communalism to divide the working class and in the moves towards the establishment of a police state.

All parliamentary parties participated in a round table discussion following the April 21 terror attacks and backed the imposition of emergency rule across the country, repressive measures that have now been extended for another month. Sirisena also reactivated the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to arrest and detain individuals without magisterial warrants.

Armed with those powers, tens of thousands of troops and police officers have fanned out across the country in the largest search operations since the end of the war against the LTTE in 2009.

A security surveillance network has been established in workplaces, plantations and tertiary education institutions, and new "counter-terrorism laws" are in preparation. Under the bogus pretext of curbing "fake news," measures are being introduced to make permanent previous restrictions on Internet and social media access in Sri Lanka.

Ruling and opposition parties, aided and abetted by the media, are systematically whipping up Islamophobia. This vicious campaign has already resulted in violence against the country's minority Muslim population, including the death of one person, scores of injuries and widespread destruction of property. The security forces have turned a blind eye to these attacks.

Under the patronage of bourgeois parties and the state forces, extreme right-wing Buddhist monks and Sinhala racist groups, such as Badu Bala Sena and Sihala Ravaya, are gaining strength. Last week all nine Muslim ministers resigned from their posts in response to the threat of further violence against the Muslim community.

© World Socialist Web Site

The purpose of the escalating anti-Muslim chauvinism is to weaken and divide the working class along ethnic lines and create the conditions for police-state rule. History is repeating itself in Sri Lanka, but in an even more brutal manner. Having conducted a three-decade communal war against the Tamil minority, the Sri Lankan ruling class is seeking to whip up anti-Muslim sentiment to tear up the social and democratic rights of the people as a whole.

The reactionary turn of the Sri Lanka ruling class can only be understood within the context of international developments. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in this year's January 3 Perspective: "As in the 1930s, the capitalist elite of all countries is feverishly building up its military and police state apparatus, while stoking extreme nationalism and anti-immigrant xenophobia to divert social tensions and protect its rule..."

"But another social force has now entered the political arena. Repressed and dismissed for so long, the working class is beginning to assert its own independent interests. The outbreak of mass social struggles in France, in the US and internationally signals the beginning of a new revolutionary period." (The Strategy of International Class Struggle and the Political Fight Against Capitalist Reaction in 2019).

The Sri Lankan ruling class is terrified by developing unrest among workers, youth and the poor throughout the island—an expression of the unfolding opposition and resistance of the international working class to the mounting attacks by government and big business on living conditions.

In January 2015, and in the midst of growing mass opposition against the incumbent Rajapakse regime, the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government came to power with the full backing of the pseudo-left, union bureaucrats and sections of the middle class. The US-orchestrated regime-change operation to remove Rajapakse as president was in order to bring Sri Lanka into line with Washington's preparations for war against China.

By the end of 2018, growing industrial action and protests by key sections of the working class, the rural poor and students against IMF-dictated austerity policies ruptured the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe unity government.

Fearful of this growing movement, Sirisena, in desperation, carried out a parliamentary coup last October to remove Wickremesinghe as prime minister and replace him with Rajapakse. Washington opposed Rajapakse's return, however, and the Supreme Court declared Sirisena's desperate move to dissolve parliament as unconstitutional. Sirisena was forced to reappoint Wickremesinghe as prime minister.

Over the past four years, the Pentagon, in line with its strategic plan to use the Sri Lanka as a key Indian Ocean marine base, has built up close military relations with Colombo. Washington responded to the Easter Sunday ISIS-inspired terror attack by immediately despatching FBI agents to "investigate." It is now pressing for a "status of forces agreement" to permanently station troops on the island under the guise of "facilitating" anti-terrorist operations.

The deepening crisis of global economy is dramatically impacting on Sri Lanka and increasing pressure on Colombo to rapidly implement the rapacious demands of international capital.

Debt servicing last year absorbed 108 percent of government revenue. The International Monetary Fund is demanding a massive reduction in the fiscal deficit through major cuts in social expenditure, increased privatisation state-owned industries and the imposition of even lower wages. These demands can only be imposed through a ruthless class-war offensive and dictatorial methods.

The bourgeois parties of all Sri Lankan communities—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—have no differences with this brutal agenda.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), using unsubstantiated claims of future terrorist attacks, is now demanding that the military not be withdrawn from the North and East of the country. Similarly, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), another party of the Colombo establishment, has fully backed the suppression of "Islamic extremism."

Sri Lankan pseudo-left groups, including the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) and United Socialist Party (USP), have responded to the April 21 terror attacks by shifting further to the right, fully embracing the ruling elite's call for "a fight against extremism."

For their part the trade unions have shut down workers' protests and strikes and are supporting the formation of so-called "defence committees," which will be appendages of the security apparatus and used to spy on militant workers.

The political crisis in Colombo demands the decisive intervention of the working class as an independent political force to protect the social and democratic rights of all working people from the escalating turn towards military and police state forms of rule. The working class must reject all forms of nationalism and chauvinism, which pit worker against worker, and demand an immediate end to emergency rule and all laws of repression.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls upon the working class to build its own action committees, independent of the trade unions, in workplaces, large estates and working-class neighbourhoods and rally support from the rural and urban poor and youth.

Political reaction can be only defeated and rooted out by putting an end to the capitalist profit system. This means placing the banks, large estates and big-business houses and industries and under the democratic control of workers, the annulment of all foreign debts and the total withdrawal of the imperialist military machine.

This struggle can only be advanced on the basis of international socialism—the fight for a workers' and peasants' government as part of the struggle for a union of socialist republics of South Asia and internationally. This is the program of the SEP. We urge workers, youth and students to join the SEP and build it as the mass revolutionary party to fight for this perspective.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**

© World Socialist Web Site