

Vote for Pani Wijesiriwardena in the Sri Lankan presidential election! Rally to fight for international socialism!

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
12 November 2019

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP-Sri Lanka) calls on workers, youth and the oppressed masses in Sri Lanka to vote for our candidate, Pani Wijesiriwardena in the presidential election on November 16, in order to show your support for a revolutionary internationalist and socialist program.

The SEP fights for a socialist alternative to imperialist war, the gutting of social rights and living standards, and the preparations of the Sri Lankan ruling elite for dictatorial forms of rule, aimed at suppressing the working class, youth and rural poor. Our program is based on the fight for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as part of the struggle for a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia based on the programme of socialist internationalism.

In the past month, all the presidential candidates of the bourgeois parties—Sajith Premadasa, of the United National Party (UNP), Gotabhaya Rajapakse, of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—have issued their manifestos and addressed meetings where they have poured out one lie after another.

Their promises have included free midday meals for school children, free fertilizer and flour for farmers, raising the wages of public and private sector workers, among countless other pledges.

Shrouded under these lies, however, the UNP, SLPP and JVP have intensified their call for “strengthening national security,” “strong and stable rule,” “law and order,” and “a disciplined society,” as the “priorities” they will implement after coming to power. These are nothing but code words for dictatorial rule.

All the factions of the ruling elite are driven by their mortal fear of the mounting social unrest among the workers that is developing in Sri Lanka, as part of the international class struggle now sweeping through every continent.

The Colombo government used the April 21 terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka, carried out by the ISIS-backed Islamic fundamentalist National Thowheeth Jamma'ath that killed more than 250 people, to impose draconian emergency laws and instigate an anti-Muslim campaign to intimidate and suppress these social struggles.

However, the workers’ struggles could not be suppressed due to the unbearable conditions the workers continue to face. In September and October, more than 16,000 non-academic workers engaged in a one-month-long strike; two hundred thousand teachers went on strike for two days; while more than 2,000 railway employees walked out, defying the repressive Essential Services regulations.

The UNP and SLPP are competing with each other to demonstrate their ability to install a strong government in the wake of the presidential election. The SLPP has fielded Gotabhaya Rajapakse, the secretary of defence under former President Mahinda Rajapakse, who ruthlessly prosecuted the war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). At the same time, the UNP candidate, Sajith Premadasa, has announced he will appoint former Army Commander Sarath Fonseka as defence minister to preside over national security.

Attempts are also underway to further integrate Sri Lanka into the US military build-up in the Indo-Pacific region, which is directed against China. In July, Washington sought to push Colombo into renewing the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), signed in 1997, and incorporating new clauses to allow US forces free access to the country. Although the government wanted to sign the agreement, it has been temporarily halted due to the public outcry against it, but remains on the agenda.

Not a single party has raised the imperialist war danger entailed with these developments, because they are all vying for the support of the US and its regional ally, India, while, at the same time, seeking financial aid from China.

In the 2015 presidential election, Washington orchestrated a regime change operation to oust former president Mahinda Rajapakse and bring Maithripala Sirisena to power. The US backed Rajapakse’s anti-democratic rule and his war against the LTTE, but opposed his relations with Beijing.

After coming to power, Sirisena, with the support of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, sharply changed Sri Lanka’s foreign policy in favour of the US and India. It has tied the Sri Lankan armed forces, particularly the navy, to the US military,

which is part of the Indo-Pacific Command.

Sri Lanka is thus being drawn into the maelstrom of global geopolitical tensions. US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Alice G. Wells told the house subcommittee for foreign affairs in October that, “Sri Lanka is an important maritime power and Indo-Pacific partner.” She added that the US was ready to work with “whichever candidate emerges victorious from next month’s election.”

Only the SEP, together with its sister parties around the world, the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), have raised the danger of another catastrophic world war, which would be fought with nuclear arms, and are fighting to build the socialist movement of the international working class.

Whoever wins the forthcoming election, his government will be forced to implement the austerity program of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Last October 28, the Colombo-based *Daily FT* published a lengthy interview, given by Manuela Goretti, IMF mission chief for Sri Lanka, in which she warned of the Sri Lankan crisis and the necessity to adhere to the IMF’s program.

She noted: “Our advice remains prudent policies along with fiscal discipline and vigilant monetary policy to shore up market confidence. It is important to strengthen Sri Lanka’s resilience to internal and external shocks, given the country’s remaining vulnerabilities, notably the still high public debt, and relatively low buffers.”

Sri Lanka has been instructed to slash its fiscal deficit to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and, as part of this, to “accelerate the reform agenda, especially structural reforms,” which means slashing subsidies and privatising state-owned enterprises. Discarding the bogus promises made during the election campaign, whoever comes to power will ruthlessly implement this program. But without a dictatorship, the ruling class cannot impose these attacks on the workers and poor.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a combination of several parties, has decided to support Premadasa. These parties have insisted that they can discuss a “solution” for the Tamil population with Premadasa as president. This amounts to yet another betrayal by these parties. The UNP has a bloody record, as do the other bourgeois parties, of trampling on the democratic rights of the Tamil minority and prosecuting war. Once again it has demonstrated that these parties are interested only in preserving the privileges of the Tamil elites, who serve the interests of the Colombo ruling elite and US imperialism.

The pseudo-left groups are playing a pernicious role, in subordinating the working class to the capitalist class and politically disarming it in the face of these threats. The Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) is campaigning openly in support of UNP candidate Premadasa, declaring that he is the progressive alternative to the “fascist” Gotabhaya Rajapakse.

Another pseudo-left outfit in Sri Lanka, the United Socialist Party (USP), has invented a “lesser evil” in Premadasa against

the fascist Gotabhaya Rajapakse. In its election statement the USP states: “Sajith [Premadasa] is a hollow person without a perspective.” It followed this meek criticism with the declaration: “You should decide not to allow Rajapakse’s election, because he is seeking to sink the country into darkness.” Thus, like the NSSP, the USP is asking workers to vote for Premadasa, in order to prevent Gotabhaya Rajapakse from taking power.

The Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) is playing a somewhat different tune, declaring that it has fielded a “socialist candidate.” In the manifesto for its candidate, Duminda Nagamuwa, the FSP explains: “Our program has two levels. The first one is a set of transitional demands and slogans, and the second represents the long term, real solution for the crisis.”

This is a kind of two stages theory, signifying that workers should limit their demands on the capitalist government and big business, and wait for a “long-term, real solution.” This is precisely what the FSP carries out in practice. In the course of the recent workers and student struggles, the FSP opposed the SEP’s socialist policies, which raised the demand for a workers’ and peasants’ government, advocating, instead, applying pressure on the government.

These pseudo-left parties are based on a reactionary nationalist perspective, which is thoroughly hostile to the independent mobilisation of the working class against every faction of the capitalist class. In this way, they prepare the ground for police-state measures by the ruling class parties and for the IMF-dictated austerity measures.

The SEP calls on workers to build their own action committees, entirely independent of the trade unions and to take struggle for their democratic rights into their own hands, in preparation for the next onslaught by the capitalist class. Such action committees should be formed in workplaces and neighbourhoods.

This initiative will prepare the working class to rally the rural poor and oppressed masses around it, and to take forward the struggle for a workers’ and peasants’ government that will implement socialist policies. The working class in Sri Lanka can carry out this struggle only by forging its unity with the international working class.

This struggle requires the building of the SEP as the mass revolutionary socialist party of the working class. We urge workers and youth to join this party, and to vote for our socialist and internationalist presidential candidate, Pani Wijesiriwardena.



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