

Fight for an international socialist program against war, social devastation and dictatorship

Vote Socialist Equality Party in the Sri Lankan general election

Manifesto of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
21 March 2020

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), is contesting the country's general election, on the program of international socialism.

Yesterday the electoral commission postponed the scheduled April 25 poll. The decision followed the cancellation of most public activities as a result of the rapidly expanding coronavirus pandemic.

Amid the deepening crisis, the SEP is proceeding with the launch of its campaign at 3 p.m. on Sunday, March 22 local time with an online public meeting streamed on the party's Facebook page.

We urge workers, young people and the rural poor to participate in the discussion and support our campaign. The SEP is fielding 43 candidates for three districts—Colombo, Jaffna and Nuwara Eliya. The Colombo list of 22 will be led by Wilani Peiris, a long-time SEP leader. Other leading members, P. Sambandan and M. Thevarajah, will head the lists for Jaffna and Nuwara Eliya respectively.

The main capitalist parties—the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), the United National Party (UNP) and its breakaway faction Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB), and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—are using the election to whip up communalism to divide workers along ethnic lines in order to hide their right-wing class war agendas. All are responsible for the devastation caused by country's 30-year anti-Tamil war.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and other Tamil bourgeois formations, as well as the Muslim parties are engaged in their own communal propaganda.

Pro-capitalist “left” groups, such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), the United Socialist Party (USP) and the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), function as political apologists for and satellites of the capitalist parties.

Opposing all these parties, the SEP's campaign will deepen the struggle to unify the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers on the basis of a revolutionary international socialist program.

The SEP is the only party telling the truth to workers, youth and the poor—that humanity faces the danger of a catastrophic nuclear Third World War, rising social inequality, environmental and health disasters, such as the coronavirus pandemic, and dictatorship and fascism. These are all global problems, created by capitalism, and require global socialist solutions.

To face the coronavirus pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens the lives of millions. Combating this escalating disaster requires the international mobilisation of all scientific and technological assets, massive financial resources and the provision of

freely accessible healthcare for all.

It is a proven fact that private profit, competing national interests and geopolitical tensions instigated by the capitalist classes are hindering the necessary organisation of the coordinated international effort required to combat the virus.

Hindu-supremacist Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lanka's authoritarian President Gotabhaya Rajapakse falsely claim that their regimes have taken the necessary preparations to deal with the pandemic and there is no reason to “panic.”

Like their imperialist masters, successive governments in both countries have gutted social services, including free public health facilities, on the orders of international capital and big business, and are ruthlessly implementing International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures.

In the name of fighting COVID-19, Rajapakse is mobilising the armed forces—a further militarization of his administration.

Only the international working class, which represents the vast majority of society, can and must take the initiative to fight for the mobilisation of the global resources needed to stop this disaster and save lives. Rational planning across the national borders can be made only on the basis of a socialist reorganisation of the world economy.

Collaborating with our sister parties of the ICFI, the SEP is taking the political and practical measures to fight for this program. We urge workers, youth and the poor to actively support this campaign.

The fight for international unity of the working class is the task of the hour!

The international working class is coming forward to fight the attacks on its social and democratic rights. These struggles are the objective basis for mobilising the only social force capable of stopping the disasters created by world capitalism.

Last year, mass demonstrations and strikes erupted across the world, including in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Chile, France, Spain, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, Kenya, South Africa, India and Hong Kong, to name just a few. In the US, GM autoworkers held their first national strike in 40 years.

On January 8, millions of Indian workers participated in a general strike to defend their rights. Maruti Suzuki autoworkers have been involved in ongoing struggles against state repression since 2013.

Sri Lankan workers are part of this global process. Hundreds of thousands of plantation workers and teachers walked out in the biggest movement of the working class since the 1980 public sector strike against IMF-dictated austerity measures. Working-class resistance to Colombo's big business policies saw the disintegration of the so-called unity administration of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Gotabhaya Rajapakse came to power by exploiting the popular hatred of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration. He promised a “stable” and “strong” regime, while whipping up Sinhala chauvinism and bolstering support from the military. However, strikes and protests in the plantations, the Kahatagaha mine and by teachers and sacked workers erupted soon after Rajapakse came to power and exposed the working-class distrust and opposition to the new regime.

Against imperialist war!

All the major imperialist powers are preparing for world war, a catastrophic conflict that will be fought with nuclear weapons. Last year, the Trump administration allocated more than \$1 trillion in annual military spending while the European powers—France, Germany and UK—are massively expanding their armed forces.

The world is on the brink of economic recession, with social tensions rising in every country. The US ruling class is recklessly attempting to regain its economic hegemony through military force and targeting China, Russia and Iran.

Washington, backed by New Delhi, has transformed India into a frontline state in its military drive against China. Encouraged by these geo-strategic arrangements, India has stepped up its pressure on Pakistan, sharply increasing the danger of nuclear war on the Indian subcontinent, with far-reaching global implications.

The anti-democratic administration of President Mahinda Rajapakse was ousted in the January 2015 presidential election as part of a Washington-inspired regime-change operation because of his close ties with China.

Following Sirisena’s installation, Washington closely integrated Sri Lanka’s military with its Indo-Pacific Command and the military build-up against China. The upgraded and already signed Access and Cross Service Agreement (ACSA) between Washington and Colombo is to be followed by a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that will give US military forces free rein to use the entire island as a military base.

Washington and New Delhi are deeply concerned about the return of Gotabhaya and Mahinda Rajapakse to power. US leaders, including President Trump, have warned President Rajapakse that Washington will not tolerate any shift toward China in Sri Lankan foreign policy. However, Beijing, well aware of US and Indian moves, is determined to advance its economic and political influence in the country.

These developments expose Rajapakse’s claim that he can pursue a “neutral foreign policy.” Like other countries in the region, Sri Lanka has been sucked into a geopolitical maelstrom.

The drive toward war cannot be prevented unless the international working class intervenes. We urge workers in Sri Lanka, and throughout South Asia, to join the ICFI’s fight to build an anti-war socialist movement of the international working class.

Fight against fascism and dictatorship!

The ruling elites everywhere have responded to the deepening economic crisis and the resurgence of working-class struggles by rapidly moving toward fascism and dictatorship.

The Trump administration’s ruthless anti-immigrant repression and attacks on democratic rights at home are part of its preparation for war. In Germany, 75 years after the collapse of Hitler’s Nazi regime, fascism is returning with the backing of the establishment parties and the state.

In India, Prime Minister Modi is whipping up anti-Islamic sentiment and moving toward Hindu-supremacist authoritarian rule. His government has rammed through the reactionary Amendment to the Citizenship Act and unleashed fascistic violence in Delhi against the Muslim community. Last August, the government locked down Kashmir, split Jammu and Kashmir—India’s only Muslim state—into two, imposing direct rule from New Delhi, massively increasing troops and cutting communication with the outside world. These drastic anti-Muslim measures are a dress-rehearsal for state repression against India’s combative working class.

In Sri Lanka, President Rajapakse, an ex-military officer deeply

implicated in war crimes, is campaigning for a two-thirds parliamentary majority for his SLPP in order to scrap all legal restrictions on his rule. Leaning heavily on the military and Sinhala-Buddhist extremists, Rajapakse is rapidly militarising his administration. Workers and youth must take a warning: a presidential dictatorship is being prepared behind the façade of a general election.

Defend democratic rights!

The jailing of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in London and his extradition show-trial is a sharp expression of the global attack on democratic rights. Assange is being persecuted for revealing the truth about US war crimes and government corruption. The SEP, along with its sister parties internationally and the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), is leading the struggle for his freedom. This is essential to the fight to defend the democratic rights of all working people.

Sri Lankan ruling-class parties have constantly used anti-Tamil communalism to divide and suppress the working class since 1948. In 1983, the UNP government unleashed its war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The war was used to suppress the Tamil masses and, above all, the working class. It resulted in the killing of hundreds of thousands of Tamils and the disappearance of tens of thousands. Death squads roamed the country abducting and killing political critics, including the high-profile editor and journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge.

In January, Rajapakse told Colombo’s UN Residential Coordinator Hanna Singer that 20,000 people who disappeared during the war were “actually dead.” This admission by the former defence secretary was unprecedented. Colombo has consistently refused to provide any information about the missing.

Attempting to whitewash the military and his own crimes, Rajapakse now claims that the missing were “forcibly recruited by the LTTE” and died on the battlefield. Parents and relatives reject this and demand to know the whereabouts of their loved ones.

The SEP fights for the perpetrators of these crimes to be arrested and punished and the circumstances of the murders to be revealed. This requires a unified struggle of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers, as part of fight for democratic rights and socialist policies.

While the war ended in May 2009, the North and East remain under continuous military occupation. Repressive laws, including emergency legislation and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), are being used against workers and the poor.

After last year’s Easter Sunday terrorist bombings on churches and hotels by an ISIS-backed Islamic group, all of the establishment parties supported the imposition of emergency rule, military deployment throughout the country, and a brutal anti-Muslim campaign. Evidence indicates that Sirisena, Wickremesinghe and Mahinda Rajapakse were given advance warning of the impending attacks but allowed them to happen in order to justify stepped-up state repression against workers and the poor.

President Rajapakse and his ruling SLPP are campaigning for “strong government”—that is, authoritarian rule. All the other political parties—the UNP and its splinter group the SJB, the JVP and Tamil and Muslim parties, including the TNA and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress—have also shifted further to the right. None of these parties have uttered a word against President Rajapakse’s militarisation of the state apparatus and his anti-democratic actions. There is no constituency for democratic rights in any of these parties.

Freedom of expression is under serious attack! Award-winning writer Shakthika Sathkumara was jailed in April and held for four months following a bogus complaint to police about his writings by the reactionary elements of the Buddhist clergy. Journalists have also been threatened by shadowy paramilitary groups following Rajapakse’s election.

The democratic rights of the masses can be achieved only in the struggle against capitalism and by a working class movement based on a socialist perspective. The SEP calls for a democratically-elected constituent assembly to draw up a new constitution. It campaigns to abolish all repressive laws and to guarantee the democratic rights of Tamils, Muslims and other minorities.

Against social inequality and austerity — fight for socialist policies

Widening social inequality is a global phenomenon. According to a recent Oxfam report, 2,153 billionaires control more wealth than the 4.6 billion poorest people on the planet. The top 1 percent collectively has twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people, nearly the entire world's population. Since the 2008 global financial crisis, the major powers, led by the US, have poured around \$4 trillion into the banks and the stock markets and intensified their attacks on the basic social rights and living standards of the working class.

The same tendencies are sharply expressed in Sri Lanka. In 2016, the country's richest 10 percent, or the top decile, earned as much as the total amount earned by the poorest 70 percent of households. The share of the bottom decile was just 1.6 percent of total household income.

Mired in an economic crisis, Sri Lanka's GDP growth rate fell to 2.6 percent last year, the lowest since 2002. The country is on the brink of defaulting on its foreign debt repayments—a total of \$20 billion for four years from 2019. Whichever party wins the election will ruthlessly implement the IMF's austerity demands in an attempt to impose the burden of the crisis on the masses.

The price of essentials is skyrocketing, drastically impacting on workers' living conditions. Confronted with a mounting financial crisis, corporations are setting backbreaking work targets and imposing new norms. Using unemployment and underemployment to drive down wages, management in every sector is resorting more and more to contract workers who have no job security.

The rural population largely exists on subsistence farming. Peasant farmers are exploited by the pesticides and fertiliser companies, which also set agricultural product prices. Mired in perpetual and growing debt, farmers are committing suicide when the financial burden becomes unbearable. Following IMF directives, successive Sri Lankan governments have slashed fertiliser subsidies.

The SEP calls for the expropriation of the banks and big businesses and for a sweeping redistribution of wealth, from the rich to the poor, to finance the following policies:

- An expansion of jobs for the unemployed through a reduction of the working week to 30 hours, without any loss of pay. The implementation of a massive works program to build public housing, schools, hospitals and roads and to create employment.
- All workers must have the basic social right to secure, well-paid jobs, with a living wage indexed to inflation. Abolish the oppressive contract labour system.
- Expand public education and health care to provide free, high-quality services for all. Organise public housing to provide decent, affordable accommodation.
- Allocate state land to all landless farmers and cancel the debts of all poor farmers and fishermen. Make cheap credit, technical advice and other assistance available. Ensure price control to guarantee a decent living standard.

Fight for the political independence of the working class

The bitter lessons of the past five years demonstrate that workers cannot defend their rights without fighting for their political independence from every faction of the ruling class.

In 2015, the TNA backed the US regime-change operation, demanding Tamil masses vote for Sirisena to win justice over war crimes and for democratic rights. When the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government was established, the TNA became its de facto partner, implementing IMF

policies and supporting the suppression of war crime probes.

In the last presidential election, this Tamil party called on the masses to support Sajith Premadasa, the presidential candidate of the UNP, a party mired in Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism.

TNA leader R. Sambandan recently appealed to Tamil voters, claiming that the “international [powers] are behind us” and “they will help to create a political solution [to Tamil problems].” This pro-US party is once again preparing to trap Tamil workers and the poor in pro-imperialist communal politics.

The NSSP, USP and the FSP backed Sirisena's bogus “good governance” campaign. The NSSP endorsed the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe regime, claiming it was the product of a “democratic revolution,” and supported its attacks on the working class. The USP and FSP supported the trade unions and their efforts to divert workers' struggles into harmless appeals to the government.

In last year's presidential election, these parties supported the UNP candidate, assisting Rajapakse to falsely pose as the only “opposition” to the government. Workers and the poor who voted for Rajapakse largely did so in protest against the Wickremesinghe regime.

Like all bourgeois parties, these fake left groups are terrified of an eruption of unified workers' struggles across ethnic lines. The working class has to reject these pro-capitalist parties so as to establish its political independence to fight the dictatorship being prepared by the ruling elite.

Organise workers' action committees

Workers must learn the lesson of recent battles—that they cannot win their rights within the straitjacket of trade unions. The unions, which are tied to capitalist parties or the “left” groups, oppose the independent mobilisation of the working class and work to isolate and dissipate any struggle.

What is required is the formation of Action Committees elected by workers, independent of unions, at every workplace and neighbourhood to organise their struggles. This will prepare the ground for workers to unite with other workers locally and internationally who face similar attacks by globally-organised companies.

During the 100,000-strong plantation workers' struggle in December 2018 workers at the Abbotsleigh estate heeded the SEP's call for Action Committees. Workers must follow this initiative in every workplace.

Action Committees will form the basis for the independent political mobilisation of workers, at the head of the rural masses, and for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' and peasants' government to implement socialist policies.

The SEP fights for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic, as part of a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia and internationally. Such a government will nationalise large foreign and local companies, and large estates and banks, under workers' control, repudiate foreign loans and reorganise production and distribution along socialist lines.

The SEP's perspective is based on Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, which demonstrated that in countries of a belated capitalist development, such as Sri Lanka, the capitalist class is incapable of carrying out the most basic democratic and social tasks. This challenge is the responsibility of the working class, as part of its struggle for socialism.

Build the SEP as a mass revolutionary party

The international working class, which has entered a new period of revolutionary struggles, needs a world socialist perspective and revolutionary leadership. The ICFI, which represents the continuity of Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism and is steered in the fight against all forms of opportunism, is this leadership. The WSWP is its voice and the SEP, the Sri Lankan section of this world party.

The SEP was formed 52 years ago as the Revolutionary Communist League and based on the ICFI's struggle against the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which joined the capitalist government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike

in 1964 and betrayed the principles of socialist internationalism.

Our party opposed the communal war against Tamils, and continues to demand the unconditional withdrawal of the occupying military from the North and East. It defended the rural masses from state terror and every form of repression and fought steadfastly for the political independence of working class on a socialist program.

We call on all workers, youth and intellectuals in Sri Lanka, South Asia and internationally to support our election campaign in every way possible. We urge you to vote for our candidates and donate to our election fund. Above all, study the history and program of the ICFI and SEP and join and build the revolutionary party.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact