

Bring down Sri Lanka's Rajapakse government! Abolish the executive presidency! No to austerity and starvation! Form action committees to fight for a socialist program of action to secure food, fuel and medicines for all!

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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This statement is also available in Sinhalese and Tamil.

Millions of working people are on the streets throughout Sri Lanka demanding the immediate resignation of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and his capitalist government, which is directly responsible for the immense hardship they face. Rajapakse has adamantly declared that he will not stand down or dissolve his government. He has defiantly proclaimed that even if he loses his parliamentary majority, he will remain president and retain control of the military and police.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) stands squarely behind the demands of working people: "Gota has got to go!" But what is to replace him? It is not enough to demand Rajapakse's removal. He is only the present-day ugly face of a corrupt and reactionary presidential state system that is organised to secure the wealth and interests of the capitalist class and perpetuate the exploitation and impoverishment of the workers and peasants throughout the island.

As a key step in addressing the current political crisis, the SEP demands the immediate abolition of the executive presidency, which, with its sweeping autocratic powers, holds a gun to the heads of the working class. Ever since its establishment in 1978 by J. R. Jayawardene, the executive presidency—with powers that enable whoever holds the office to arbitrarily impose the will of the capitalist elites—has been used to ruthlessly suppress the democratic and social rights of workers, the poor and the rural masses.

Last week, Rajapakse again exploited his presidential powers to proclaim a state of emergency, impose a curfew and put police, soldiers and armoured vehicles on the streets in a desperate bid to shut down the mass protests. He failed only because working people in their tens of thousands courageously defied the threat.

However, Rajapakse is biding his time. He can reimpose emergency rule without warning and again mobilise the military. He can ban industrial action, proscribe organisations and political parties, censor the media and arbitrarily arrest and detain individuals. The presidency itself must be abolished. Along with Gotabhaya, the executive presidency and the barrage of anti-democratic laws in the hands of the government have got to go.

The Socialist Equality Party demands the repeal of the Essential Public Services Act that has been used to criminalise strikes by public sector workers. We also demand the repeal of the Public Security Act and notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act that give police state powers to the security forces.

The SEP insists that the purpose of these necessary democratic political changes, which can be achieved only through determined struggle by the working class, the rural poor and youth, is to set into motion a fundamental restructuring of the economy along socialist lines.

In opposition to the austerity program of the government and opposition parties alike, we are advancing a program of action for the working class to mobilise its social power and impose its own solution to the immense social and economic crisis—one that puts human needs before investor profit.

Capitalist governments everywhere have no answers but to impose further terrible burdens on working people. This is fuelling the class struggle in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, as well as in the major imperialist centres, including the US. Workers in Sri Lanka are not alone in their struggles. Workers can turn to their class allies internationally for mutual assistance, in the first instance to Indian workers who last week mounted a two-day general strike against the austerity and privatisation agenda of the Modi government.

What is to be done? The Sri Lankan capitalist class is completely incapable of addressing any of the pressing social needs of the workers and poor. No amount of pleading or pressure will cause them to change course when their profits and wealth are at stake.

The working class can only fight for its needs if it establishes its own organisations, independent of all factions of the bourgeoisie and the trade unions that have played such a treacherous role in suppressing the wave of mass strikes and protests over the past two years.

The SEP calls for the formation of action committees as the first step in the self-organisation of the working class. We call on other workers to do likewise. Establish independent, democratically elected action committees in factories, workplaces, plantations and working class neighbourhoods throughout the country. We offer every political assistance in the building of such fighting organisations of the working class.

The SEP insists that the working class should not tighten its belt to suit what the capitalists can afford within their system of nation states and private property. Rather it has to advance its own class solution to the social and economic crisis.

We propose the following program and policies to animate the work of the Action Committees to address the pressing needs of the masses:

*** For workers' democratic control over the production and distribution of all essential items and other resources critical for the lives of people! Nationalise the banks, big corporations, plantations and other major economic nerve centres!**

The capitalist class exploits its ownership of the means of production and distribution to amass enormous profits. The only way for the working class to provide for its essential needs is to take them out of the hands of the capitalists and to make an inventory of the resources so that they can be used to end the current suffering and misery.

*** Repudiate all foreign debts! No to the austerity demands of the IMF and World Bank that represent the international bankers and financial institutions!**

The Rajapakse government blames its harsh austerity measures on the need to repay billions of dollars to the global bankers. The opposition parties agree. Instead of the \$US7 billion due this year flowing into the coffers of the international banks, it should be used to pay for the food, fuel, medicines and other essential goods needed by working people.

*** Seize the colossal wealth of the billionaires and corporations!**

According to World Inequality Database, in 2021 the richest 10 percent of Sri Lankan society held a massive 63.8 percent of the island's total wealth while the bottom 50 percent had just 4.3 percent. This vast wealth which was created by the working class must be seized and distributed on the basis of social need.

*** Cancel all debts of poor and marginal farmers and small business holders! Reinstate all subsidies, including**

fertiliser subsidies for farmers!

By providing a way out of their crushing economic problems, the working class will become a pole of attraction for the oppressed rural masses and the operators of small businesses who are burdened by high debt, costly inputs and prices that do not meet their essential needs.

*** Guarantee jobs for all with decent and safe working conditions! Index wages to the cost of living!**

If the IMF and international bankers have their way, there will be an avalanche of job destruction. Inflation has already run rampant and eaten away wages. Left in the hands of the trade unions, jobs, wages and conditions will be further bargained away as has been the case for years.

The fight for this program provides a way forward and will imbue the working class with confidence in its capacities, draw the rural masses to its side and, through the development of a network of Action Committees, provide the organisational foundations for the working class to take power and establish a workers' and peasants government to begin the socialist reorganisation of society.

Workers fighting in Sri Lanka share a common trench with their class brothers and sisters and common class enemies. The rising tide of class struggle around the world gives Sri Lankan workers potential allies and bases of support in factories, workplaces and offices everywhere. This can be developed into an internationally coordinated struggle against the economic domination of global corporations, banks and finance houses to put an end to capitalism.

The Socialist Equality Party must also issue a warning. The Rajapakse regime, like its predecessors going back to formal independence in 1948, and its racist allies will resort to communal provocations and the poison of Sinhala chauvinism in a desperate effort to divide Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers along ethnic lines. However, all workers and the poor are facing the same desperate economic crisis. The rejection of all forms of nationalism and communalism is essential in building the unity of the working class in Sri Lanka and internationally.

A socialist revolution is needed in Sri Lanka and for that a revolutionary leadership is essential. The entire history of the past century has demonstrated that without a revolutionary party even the most militant and determined struggles of the working class are inevitably defeated, opening the door to counter-revolution and savage repression.

We urge workers and youth who agree with this program to join the Socialist Equality Party and build it into the mass party of the working class.



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