

A socialist program for striking Sri Lankan workers

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)

27 April 2022

The following statement is being circulated by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) among Sri Lankan workers who are joining a general strike today against the Rajapakse government.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) stands with millions of workers who have launched a one-day general strike today against the oppressive Gotabhaya Rajapakse government. They are joining the broad struggle by hundreds of thousands demanding President Rajapakse and his government resign. All port, power, postal, railway, petroleum, bank and state administration workers, as well as teachers and plantation workers, will take part in today's struggle.

Facing unbearable increases in the prices of essentials and acute scarcities, workers and the peasant masses are mired in a social catastrophe. The Rajapakse government has doubled the price of consumer goods with total disregard for people's lives and deploys the police and military to suppress the protests. The killing of Chaminda Lakshan in a police shooting at protesting people demanding fuel in Rambukkana, shows that the government is ready to drown popular movements in blood.

Rajapakse has used the draconian powers of the executive presidency, in order to impose austerity measures with more to come from talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a bailout loan. The government has already taken measures to drastically cut state expenditure and is preparing to increase electricity bills after doubling the price of gas. The IMF insisted that taxes be increased, prices be further increased and state-owned enterprises be privatised, resulting in the slashing of jobs, wages and pensions.

The global economic crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two years, is continuing and now worsening with the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. What has emerged in Sri

Lanka is an extreme expression of this crisis.

Hundreds of thousands of workers striking today to defeat the attacks on their social position confront important political issues. At the same time, working people who have been involved in campaigns at Galle Face Green in Colombo and throughout the country over the past three weeks face the same issues.

The slogan of trade unions today is "Let us chase the oppressive government away! Let us win the mass struggle!" But they maintain a deathly silence over what comes next. In reality, the unions support the reactionary program of the Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) of an "interim administration" to prepare for elections.

Pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), its unions and student organisations have lined up with these trade unions.

What will be the program of an interim regime comprising all the ruling and opposition parties and the government to follow? It will be the draconian austerity program dictated by the IMF to prop up capitalism in Sri Lanka. None of the establishment parties has any alternative. All of them have a record of implementing the IMF dictates in the past.

After a lengthy silence, trade unions have declared that they will join the struggle to oust the government, but they do so to divert the opposition of workers into the arms of the opposition parties.

All these unions have betrayed the strikes of workers over the past year. The teacher trade unions sold out the strike by teachers that lasted more than 100 days by accepting the government's pitiful wage offer. The Federation of Health Professionals (FHP) has bluntly stated that it is calling strikes to "manage the militancy of membership." Plantation unions including Ceylon Workers Congress have repeatedly betrayed the wage struggles of poorly paid plantation workers.

The call for an interim administration is a political trap for the working class. There are no solutions to the social misery facing workers and the poor within the capitalist system.

* What can be done? The SEP is calling on workers to build their own action committees independent of the trade unions and all the bourgeois parties. These committees need to be built in every factory, workplace and working-class neighbourhood throughout the country. The SEP is ready to extend its political assistance.

The SEP demands the abolition of the autocratic executive presidency and the repeal of all repressive laws including the Public Security Act, Essential Services Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Against the IMF's austerity program that the Rajapakse government and opposition parties are all intent on carrying forward, we present a socialist program of action that puts the basic social needs of working people ahead of the profits of big business.

*** Take the production and distribution of all essential goods and other resources critical for public lives under the democratic control of the workers! Nationalise banks, large corporations, large estates and other major economic centres under the workers' control!**

The capitalist class exploits its ownership of the means of production and distribution to amass huge profits. The only way for the working class to provide its essential necessities is to seize them from capitalists and integrate them so as to end the current oppression and misery.

*** Repudiate all foreign loans! Reject the austerity demands of IMF and the World Bank representing international banks and financial institutions!**

The money should be spent to pay for food, fuel, medicine and other goods, essential for the working people instead of paying \$US7 billion for the coffers of international banks.

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

According to the World Inequality Database, the wealthiest 10 percent in Sri Lankan society had an enormous 63.8 percent of the island's wealth while the bottom 50 percent had just 4.3 percent. This huge wealth created by the working class should be seized and distributed to meet the social needs.

*** Abolish all the debt of the poor and extremely poor peasants and small business holders! Reinstate all the subsidies including fertiliser subsidies for the peasantry!**

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 and the poor are facing a catastrophe created by an international crisis. In its fight against it, the friend of the Sri Lankan workers is international working class that has come to struggles against similar attacks. Sri Lankan workers' closest ally in this struggle is the workers in India and South Asia.

The struggle of Sri Lankan workers can be developed into an internationally coordinated struggle against the hegemony of global corporations, banks and financial institutions by joining with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees initiated by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

In order to join with SEP to fight on this program, contact or send an SMS to 0773562327.

Register for the International Online May Day Rally held by ICFI (at 12.30 a.m. on Monday, May 2, Sri Lankan time), the world party of socialist revolution, to mobilise the working class against imperialist war, global pandemic and the capitalist system.

Click on this link:
<https://www.wsws.org/si/special/pages/international-mayday-online-rally-2022.html>



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact