

# May Day 2022: The class struggle in Sri Lanka in the “decade of socialist revolution”

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5 May 2022

*This is the report delivered by M. Thevarajah to the 2022 International May Day Online Rally held on May 1. Thevarajah is a member of the political committee Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka. To view all speeches, visit [wsws.org/mayday](https://wsws.org/mayday).*

At the beginning of 2020, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), in its New Year statement published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, characterized this decade as “the decade of intensifying class struggle and world socialist revolution.” Developments since have powerfully vindicated this prognosis, which was achieved through a Marxist analysis of the objective global political, economic and social crisis, within a historical and international context.

Although the development of class struggle globally suffered a temporary setback in mid-2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, workers from many sectors—auto, health, education, power, transport, mining, banking—in the US, Europe and Asia-Pacific, including South Asia, have entered into struggles. This includes strikes and protests, starting in late 2020, over a series of demands, including higher wages, better working conditions, job security, and protection against deadly unsafe conditions during the pandemic.

The immense economic, political and social crisis of global capitalism, highly intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the US-NATO proxy war against Russia, has propelled workers, youth and the oppressed masses into action. We can see the expression of this global development in class and social struggles throughout South Asia, and particularly the ongoing popular uprising against the Sri Lankan government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse.

Marking an important turning point in the

development of this anti-government mass movement, the working class has now begun to enter into the struggle as an organized class. The April 28 general strike involving millions of workers from all sectors—public, private, semi-government and, most importantly, the plantations—was a clear indication of that. This was unprecedented not only due to the massive participation, but also in that the working class as a class came out in the streets on an open political demand: the resignation of the government.

After blocking an independent intervention of the working class in the popular protests demanding the resignation of Rajapakse and his government, the trade unions were forced to call the strike due to the immense pressure from their members. However, the unions’ aim in calling the action was to contain growing working class opposition and politically tie it to an interim government trap promoted by the bourgeois parliamentary opposition—the Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—to keep the popular movement within the confines of bourgeois rule.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) intervened powerfully in the April 28 general strike, in an important step in its continuous active political intervention in the ongoing mass uprising. The SEP advocates an independent program for the working class, based on a revolutionary socialist perspective. We distributed thousands of copies of a party statement outlining its socialist program of action for the working class among striking workers in several areas of the island.

Our statement calls for the abolition of the autocratic executive presidency and the repeal of all repressive laws. It also states: “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.”

The Tamil bourgeois parties are playing a particularly reactionary role in propping up the Rajapakse government against mass protests. The main parliamentary party, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), and associated Tamil nationalist groups maintained a deafening silence over the developing popular protests for weeks.

Finally, on April 13, TNA leader M.A. Sumanthiran broke the silence by boasting that he had been negotiating behind the backs of workers and the Tamil people with leaders of the Rajapakse government and some other politicians in the Colombo bourgeois establishment, including Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse and former presidents Maithipala Sirisena and Chandrika Kumaratunga. He admitted: “I have been involved in many of the ongoing negotiations to try to bring stability to the political situation.”

That is, the TNA leader had been conspiring with the government and other bourgeois leaders to bring political “stability” to capitalist rule, by ending protests, so that this or any “interim” government can go ahead with the IMF-dictated austerity measures.

This treacherous collaboration of the TNA with the Rajapakse government has strengthened the government’s hands as it prepared for a brutal crackdown on the protesters. Just six days from Sumanthiran’s remarks, one worker, Chaminda Lakshan, was killed and dozens more injured in a brutal police shooting against thousands of people protesting against higher fuel prices in Rambukkana.

Plantation workers are increasingly intervening in the popular uprising. During the April 28 general strike, production was completely shut down in the hill country plantation district, shops were also closed in several towns in areas like Hatton and Kotagala in support of the workers’ action, and striking workers flooded towns in mass demonstrations.

The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), the main plantation union, which is also functioning as a political party, has been actively supporting the government’s assault on the basic social and democratic rights of the working class, as a partner of the government. The CWC refused to “take a side” in the anti-government

popular protests for weeks. Now, facing growing opposition of workers, it has announced that it will act as an “independent” group in the parliament and also support the no-confidence motion prepared by the main opposition SJB.

The CWC’s move has nothing do with any concern for the unbearable conditions confronting workers, but is rather aimed at channeling anger behind the bourgeois opposition parties to form an alternative capitalist government only to continue with the same IMF-dictated austerity measures.

Against all those parties of the bourgeois political establishment, including the SJB, JVP and TNA, along with their pseudo-left hangers on and the unions, the SEP is fighting to mobilize the working class in an independent political movement, rallying poor farmers and other oppressed masses, to overthrow the Rajapakse government. In opposition to an “interim” bourgeois government, we fight for a government of workers and peasants, which will be committed to socialist policies.

For this, the workers need to break from all unions, which are acting as an industrial police force for the government and employers, and form their own action committees.

The SEP, which has taken the initiative in forming such action committees in various sectors, including among plantation workers, health workers, education workers and artists, is ready to provide all political assistance for workers to form such committees. Through our action committees, we are fighting to make the workers in the plantations aware of their historic tasks and make them conscious of their leading role in the developing struggles.

In its struggle for the establishment of a government of workers and peasants, the Sri Lankan working class needs to form the most powerful bonds of unity with their class brothers and sisters, particularly in South Asia, including India, as part of a global movement of the international working class for world socialist revolution.



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