Sri Lankan pseudo-left FSP holds talks with right-wing parties

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Sri Lanka has been convulsed by the worsening global economic crisis and an upsurge of struggles of workers and youth since early April. Millions of workers participated in one-day general strikes on April 28 and May 6. They were demanding the ouster of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and his government and an end to catastrophic social conditions but these demands were essentially directed against the entire political establishment.

Weakened by the political crisis, President Rajapakse is making desperate attempts to save capitalist rule, suppress the mass movement and implement reactionary austerity demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

For their part, the opposition parties, including the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), are seeking to channel this mass anger into safe parliamentary channels. Whatever their minor tactical differences, these parties support the IMF's agenda and are campaigning for an interim regime then a general election to carry it out. The pro-capitalist trade unions have intervened to contain the opposition of workers and tie them to these capitalist parties.

The Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) is actively assisting these rotten political manoeuvres and has begun discussions with the opposition parties to sound out a possible alliance. At the same time, it is closely collaborating with the trade unions to prevent the class struggle taking a revolutionary direction.

The FSP was formed in 2012 by a breakaway faction of the JVP as it was increasingly discredited among workers and particularly youth because of its support for capitalist rule and for the brutal 26-year anti-Tamil communal war. Today's prominent FSP leaders remained inside the JVP throughout the war. Their split involved no fundamental break with the JVP's communalism and opportunist politics.

The role of this fake left party in blocking any independent movement of the working class and propping up capitalist rule has been abundantly clear over the past two months. The FSP has abandoned its previous socialistic phrase-mongering, insisting socialism is a task for the distant future, and now offers the false hope of solutions within capitalism by ending corruption and making token reforms.

The FSP has recently held talks with the SJB, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and other smaller political parties, including the United Socialist Party (USP), another pseudo-left group.

The USP has a record of backing the campaigns of what were previously the country's two main bourgeois parties—the United National Party and Sri Lanka Freedom Party—in the guise of a "united front" to defend democratic rights.

On May 20, FSP leaders, including Pubudu Jayagoda, Duminda Nagamuwa and Sanjeewa Bandara, held talks with a SJB delegation led by party general secretary Ranjith Madduma Bandara and Kabir Hashim.

The right-wing SJB was formed in a split in early 2020 from the deeply discredited UNP, now a rump party with only one MP, its leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, a former prime minister. The SJB pursues the same anti-working class, pro-business, pro-US program as the UNP. As for Wickremesinghe, President Rajapakse has made him the new prime minister to demonstrate to the IMF that the government will implement all of its austerity measures. SJB has given its conditional support to the Wickremesinghe government.

The FSP has no difficulty in seeking an alliance with the right-wing bourgeois SJB. The FSP Facebook reported Jayagoda's jubilant remarks about the "broad discussion" held with the SJB. "We discussed what actions we could take to get gains for the masses and solutions to the problems of people in the short term in this urgent situation," he said.

In reality, a SJB government would be just as ruthless as the current regime in imposing the austerity measures demanded by international finance capital, yet the FSP shamelessly presents it as the means for ending the social disaster facing working people.

The FSP is also cynically promoting the SJB as a defender of democratic rights.

Jayagoda declared that there were "small differences" between the two parties over how to abolish the executive presidency but agreement existed on its complete abolition. The autocratic executive president, which concentrates enormous powers in the hands of president, was established by the SJB's parent party, the UNP. In reality the SJB and the FSP are not proposing the immediate abolition of executive presidency but its modification.

The two parties also discussed the May 9 physical attack on anti-government protesters by armed thugs from Rajapakse's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP)—a provocation that is now being used for a police witch hunt against anti-government protesters. FSP leaders declared that the SJB assured its support to "defeat this repression"—a completely worthless promise.

The SJB are desperate to distance themselves from the UNP's long record of anti-democratic repression so as to gain credibility in front of the masses. The FSP is obligingly painting this establishment party in democratic colours. No wonder, as SJB MP Hashim reported, the SJB is preparing a "working paper" for another discussion with the FSP.

The FSP held similar talks on May 18 with the capitalist TNA, the main party of the country's Tamil elites, and for the same purpose, to

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cynically promote it as the means for addressing the social catastrophe facing workers and youth. In the case of the TNA, the FSP is also presenting it as the defender of the democratic rights of Tamils. In reality, the TNA's "solution" to the so-called national question is to devolve more powers to the Tamil bourgeoisie at the expense of Tamil workers, peasants and youth.

At the same time, the FSP, its Class Struggle Center (CSC), and small trade unions are closely collaborating with other unions to derail workers' struggles. This intervention was particularly criminal during the protests and strikes by workers that erupted in early April, including April 28 and May 6 general strikes.

The Trade Union Coordinating Committee (TUCC) and the Trade Union and Mass Organisations (TUMO) called these protests and strikes to demand the resignation of President Rajapakse and his government and its replacement with an interim regime—in line with the demands of the SJB and JVP. These union fronts did not raise any demands or policies to defend the social and democratic rights of the working class but promoted empty slogans about "no gas, no electricity, no fuel" to corral the anger of workers.

CSC leader Duminda Nagamuwa and Sanjeewa Bandara, who heads the United Teachers Services Union affiliated to the FSP, are partners in the TUCC. These FSP union leaders backed the wretched betrayals of the two union fronts, including their abandonment of a planned indefinite general strike from May 11—at the height of the Rajapakse administration's crisis. Like the political establishment as a whole, the trade unions were terrified by the millions of workers who joined the two one-day general strikes.

As outlined by general secretary Gunaratnam on May 11, the FSP's proposals for "immediate solutions" to the present economic and social crisis are very revealing of its pro-capitalist nature. Its call for an interim government is very similar to that of the SJB and JVP, but also the country's big business lobbies and capitalist media.

The FSP's seven-point program calls for a temporary interim regime "appointed with the participation of all political parties represented in the parliament" for six months. Its task must be to prepare "a new pro-people constitution which will abolish executive presidency and put it into a referendum." It elaborates extensive "democratic" window dressing—including a list of social rights, judicial reviews. the outlawing of racism and national oppression, as well as extensive "consultations" with trade unions and organisations representing anti-government protesters, farmers, fisherman, students and others.

All of this is to obscure the fact that this will be a bourgeois constitution, drawn up by the existing despised capitalist parties, that will defend the privileges and wealth of the island's super-rich and the interests of foreign investors, banks and international finance capital.

The Socialist Equality Party is the only party calling for the immediate abolition of the executive presidency not through the bankrupt parliamentary system made up of political servants of capitalism but through the independent action of working people as part of a broader struggle to end the social disaster facing workers and youth.

The FSP rails against corruption in order to disguise the real source of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka and internationally in the profit system itself. It calls for higher taxes on the wealthy and the "restructuring" of foreign debts, but not the expropriation of the wealthy of the super-rich and the complete repudiation of all foreign debts.

Significantly the FSP is an ardent admirer of Syriza in Greece and PODEMOS in Spain. The pseudo-left Syriza government, which came to power in 2015, implemented the dictates of finance capital heaping the burden of the country's deep economic crisis onto the working class with devastating social consequences. The PODEMOS entered a coalition government with the Socialist Party and backed its attacks on the social rights of working people.

Now the FSP is promoting itself as the best means for doing the same in Sri Lanka and saving bourgeois rule. It is no surprise that the Sri Lankan establishment media is giving considerable prominence to this fake left group and the keenness of capitalist parties to seek its assistance.

The FSP's hostility to the independent mobilisation of the working class and the fight for a socialist program flows from its class position. This party represents sections of the upper-middle class in the country terrified by the developing working-class struggle.

The SEP calls on workers and youth to reject the FSP's phony populist posturing and its perspective of an interim capitalist government. There is no solution to the immense social problems facing working people within the profit system and the national framework.

The Rajapakse-Wickremesinghe government is preparing to implement ruthless attacks dictated by the IMF with the backing of opposition parties. If the interim government advocated by the FSP were to come to power, it would be doing exactly the same.

The SEP alone has advanced a program on which the working class can fight to defend its social and democratic rights. We call on workers to build action committees, independent of the trade unions and capitalist parties, including their pseudo-left hangers-on, in every factory, workplace, estate and working-class suburb.

The SEP has outlined policies for which these action committees could fight, including the repudiation of foreign debts, workers' control of production and distribution, the nationalisation of the major banks and corporations under the democratic control of the working class. Such a struggle would win to its side broad layers of the urban and rural poor, laying the basis for a fight for a workers' and peasants' government committed to the socialist reconstruction of society to meet the needs of the vast majority, not the profits of the wealthy few.

This political fight is part of the emerging struggles of the working class internationally and needs to be directed at the abolition of capitalism around the world. We urge workers and youth to join the SEP and to fight for this program.

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