

The pandemic, the global crisis of capitalism, the resurgence of class struggles and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)—Part 1

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)

9 June 2022

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The following is the main resolution adopted by the Third National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka, held online from May 14–16, 2022. The resolution, which was adopted unanimously, is published in three parts.

The SEP Congress also adopted an emergency resolution “Popular uprising against the Rajapakse government and the tasks of the SEP.”

1. The Third National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) pledges to vigorously fight for the scientific strategy of COVID-19 elimination, for the mobilization of the global working class against imperialist war, and to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

2. The ICFI correctly analysed the COVID-19 pandemic, which erupted in early 2020, as a “trigger event” in world history. It has deepened the crisis and contradictions of world capitalism and is “unleashing the long-suppressed forces of social transformation,” as the January 4, 2021 Perspective of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) titled, “The political lessons of the pandemic and the fight for socialism in 2021,” explained.

3. The analysis and program advanced by the ICFI and the WSWS since the eruption of the pandemic have been thoroughly vindicated. According to official figures, the global death toll has surpassed 5 million and infected cases have risen to over 245 million and continue to increase. As the *Economist* calculated last November, the real death toll would be a staggering 18.4 million if excess deaths were included. The deadly spread of the virus in the US, the centre of world capitalism, across Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia and Australia, with the spinning off of dangerous new variants and an increasingly long list of potential long-term effects, underscores that there is no national solution to the pandemic.

4. The ICFI has compared the new coronavirus pandemic with the outbreak of World War I, which erupted after a series of retaliatory actions following the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand and his wife on June 28, 1914. The war signified the explosion of the economic and geopolitical contradictions of world capitalism, accumulated over years and sharply expressed in the rivalry of European powers for resources and markets. As David North, chairperson of the International Editorial Board of the WSWS and the SEP-US, explained:

“The war could not be ended, despite its horrors, because the geopolitical and economic interests of the ruling classes of the warring capitalist powers did not allow for a negotiated settlement.

“For the war to end, the direction of society had to be taken out of the hands of the capitalist rulers. That is, a force greater than the armies commanded by the governments of the day had to be mobilised. That was the working class of all the warring countries. Armed with a revolutionary socialist program, the international working class had to wage war on war. That was the perspective of Lenin and Trotsky” (“May Day 2021 and the global class struggle,” WSWS, May 2, 2021).

The working class in Russia intervened in the upheaval as an independent political force under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and Trotsky, seized power in that country and began the task of the socialist transformation of the world. Today, the working class—internationalised as never before with the globalisation of production—in the imperialist centres as well as in the countries of belated capitalist development, such as India and Sri Lanka, joins struggles in a far more advanced systemic crisis of capitalism, and faces the same task of overthrowing capitalism and taking the path of the socialist transformation of the world.

5. In a global disaster, not seen since the Second World War, millions have lost their jobs and means of income and have been thrown into poverty, hunger and death. Even before the pandemic, global social inequality had deepened, with the richest 1 percent owning more than twice the wealth of the rest of the world’s 6.9 billion people. The combined wealth of the world’s billionaires has increased by 60 percent from \$US8 trillion to \$13.1 trillion. Oxfam’s report in January 2021 said the \$540 billion in wealth hoarded by the 10 richest billionaires “is more than enough to prevent anyone on Earth from falling into poverty because of the virus and to pay for a COVID-19 vaccine for all.”

6. Mass deaths and ever-widening social inequality are the results of the homicidal policies pursued by the capitalist class in response to the pandemic. They have followed the policy of “herd immunity”—which says that if the virus spreads unchecked it will eventually exhaust itself. The other strategy of the ruling class is “mitigation” of the pandemic through vaccination and masking. In practice this has proven to be only a modification of herd immunity, as attested by the successive waves of mass infection and death that have engulfed the world. Under these policies, regimes across the globe, including that of US President Joe Biden and the far-right government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India, have reopened economies and schools in unsafe conditions. The capitalist class’ policy of normalising death is determined by its prioritising of profits over human lives. As Marx put it, “The restless

never-ending process of profit-making alone is what he [the capitalist] aims at" (*Capital, Volume 1*, Progress Publishers, p.151).

7. In contrast to the strategies of herd immunity and mitigation, the ICFI champions the scientific strategy of ending the pandemic through elimination and eradication. This strategy is based on policies advanced by the foremost epidemiologists, virologists and other scientists and entails the universally-coordinated deployment of every weapon in the arsenal of measures to combat COVID-19. The corporate enterprises that produced vaccinations are prioritising profits while the countries in which they are based pursue vaccine nationalism.

8. The international working class has begun to fight back against the disastrous social conditions created by the pandemic. The support gathered from teachers and other workers internationally for the October 1 and 15, 2021 international strikes initiated by UK parent Lisa Diaz against the reckless reopening of schools in that country marks a turning point in international class struggles. The protest movement that erupted internationally against the police murder of George Floyd in Minnesota; significant struggles by autoworkers at Volvo and Dana in the US, which drew international support; and teachers' struggles in many countries, including the 250,000-strong educators' strike in Sri Lanka, are among them. These struggles have developed outside or broken through the straitjacket imposed by the pro-capitalist trade unions, which at every point attempt to hold back and politically suppress the working class.

9. The development of international class struggles underscores the significance of the powerful call made by the ICFI for the building of the IWA-RFC. "It will be a means through which workers throughout the world can share information and organise a united struggle to demand protection for workers, the shutdown of unsafe facilities and nonessential production, and other emergency measures that are necessary to stop the spread of the virus," declared the April 23, 2021 ICFI statement "Forward to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees!"

The IWA-RFC will "strive", continued the statement, "to unify workers in a common worldwide struggle, opposing every effort by capitalist governments and the reactionary proponents of the innumerable forms of national, ethnic and racial chauvinism and identity politics to split up the working class into warring factions...."

"The fight against the pandemic, and against war, inequality, exploitation and dictatorship, is a fight against the entire capitalist social and economic order. Workers of all countries must be united in a common political offensive to take power, expropriate the oligarchs, and establish a socialist society based on the rational, scientific and democratic control of production for the purpose of serving social need, not private profit."

10. The response of the ruling class globally to the crisis and to the rising tide of working-class struggles is to turn to dictatorial forms of rule. This turn has been sharply expressed in the US, the cockpit of world capitalism. From the White House, former President Trump attempted a fascist coup on January 6, 2021, instigating a mob assault on the Capitol, as part of a conspiracy to overturn the 2020 presidential election results. This coup had the backing of his Republican Party, far-right forces and sections of the state apparatus. The coup plotters are now attempting to stage a comeback. This development is a culmination of the protracted crisis of American democracy, rooted in explosive social contradictions, which are above all expressed in the profound and ever-widening social inequality that characterises contemporary American capitalism. The US ruling class, terrified by mounting social opposition, seeks to crush the working class. Bipartisan class unity in this counter-revolutionary effort has been reflected in the actions the Democratic Party and the Biden administration have taken to whitewash the coup plot. The SEP in the US is the only party that exposed the coup attempt, providing a revolutionary program to mobilise the working class against the threat of fascism and presidential dictatorship. It is not a passing development or mere American phenomenon. It has encouraged the ruling classes in every

country, including Sri Lanka, to move further to the right.

11. Mired in the pandemic crisis, the imperialist powers are seeking to advance their geopolitical interests. Washington, as part of its attempt to reassert the global dominance it has lost over decades, is targeting China as its main rival along with Russia. Two decades ago, it invaded Afghanistan under the false banner of the "war on terror," as part of its drive for control of the resources and markets, including oil and gas, of the Middle East, and with the ultimate aim of dominating the Eurasian landmass. The collapse of the Washington-backed Kabul puppet regime last August was a historical debacle for US imperialism. It has not lessened but intensified Washington's hegemonic drive, as shown by its provocations against China using the pro-US Taiwan. As Trump did, Biden is touting the bogus Wuhan Lab theory, blaming Beijing for the emergence and global spread of the coronavirus. In September, 2021 the US, along with the UK, initiated an agreement with Australia (AUKUS) to implicate the latter still more fully in its anti-China war drive, including through the provision of nuclear submarine technology. Washington is harnessing India as a frontline state in its drive against China, arming and aligning it with Australia and Japan in a quadrilateral military alliance (the Quad).

The nationalist Stalinist oligarchy in Beijing is seeking to counter the US by building its own strategic and economic prowess and, as part of this, developing the Belt and Road Initiative. Geopolitical tensions between the US and European powers are also rising amid Washington's threats to impose economic and trade sanctions on those countries too. The signing of the AUKUS agreement, behind the back of the EU, has further deepened tensions across the Atlantic, particularly between France and the US. These developments underscore the unprecedented intensification of geopolitical rivalries and the threat of a catastrophic global nuclear war.

12. At the bottom of the world capitalist crisis and conflicts are the fundamental contradictions of the world capitalist system—that is the contradictions between the globalised world economy and the nation-state system, and between socialised production and the private ownership of the means of production. The danger of a Third World War, the global pandemic and social disaster can be prevented only by mobilising the international working class, that is by building a socialist movement of the international working class along the lines advanced by the ICFI in its statement "Socialism and the Fight Against War," issued on February 18, 2016.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and its implications

13. Last December marked thirty years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy. The liquidation of the USSR has vast implications and lessons for the working class, now coming into decisive battles against capitalism internationally, without which it cannot achieve its historical task of socialist revolution.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union foreshadowed the profound developments which have now come to the surface—the global crisis of capitalism, the imperialist drive toward Third World War and the upsurge of the international working class.

14. The destruction of the first workers' state, established by the socialist revolution of October 1917, was the outcome of the reactionary nationalist policies that the bureaucracy pursued based on Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country." It confirmed the warnings of the Trotskyist movement of the counterrevolutionary nature of Stalinism. The globalisation of capitalist production and associated technological developments undermined the autarchic Stalinist economies and the nationally-based programs and policies of all countries, political parties, and trade unions.

15. The Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy was the main prop of the post-Second World War equilibrium, established on the basis of the hegemony of American imperialism. The US saw the dissolution of the Soviet Union

in 1991 as an opportunity to reassert its unrivaled domination throughout the world. It was glorified by imperialist propagandists as the “end of history,” creating a “unipolar moment” in which the unchallengeable power of the United States would dictate a “New World Order.” The last three decades have seen how the US has engaged in continuous and ever-expanding warfare, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, and the re-emergence of bitter inter-imperialist rivalries.

Two years earlier in 1989, the Chinese Maoist bureaucracy, an offshoot of Stalinism, intensified the restoration of capitalism in China, which began in the late 1970s, with its police-state repression of working-class resistance and the opening up of more “free trade zones” in the country to transnational investments.

16. Only the Trotskyist movement, represented by the ICFI since 1953, fought against Stalinism, which led to the degeneration of the Soviet Union, and to defend the program of world socialist revolution. The ICFI was established in 1953, splitting from Pabloite revisionism, which adapted to Stalinism and the Stalinist bureaucracy, attributing to it a progressive role and abandoning the Trotskyist program. This struggle culminated in the 1985–86 split in the ICFI, in which the genuine Trotskyists broke from the national opportunists of the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) and defended proletarian internationalism. In this struggle, the ICFI was able to develop the analysis and deepen the understanding of the underlining changes in the world economy, with its globalisation of production, which undermined all nationalist programs.

Through this struggle, only the ICFI was prepared for the crisis that emerged with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Not only did the Stalinist parties around the world move sharply further right; the revisionist and radical organisations revolving around the Stalinist bureaucracy expressed shock and demoralisation and declared the “end of socialism.”

In contrast, on January 4, 1992, David North, national secretary of the Workers League (the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party in US), delivered a report analysing the historical background and significance of the end of the USSR. He explained:

“The breakup of the Soviet Union intensifies the world crisis, and this will provide the possibility for a fresh offensive of the working class. But its development and success depend upon the building of our movement. We base our work on an unshakeable confidence in the role of the Fourth International. To the extent that we are able to establish our authority in the working class, the confusion about Stalinism will be dissipated” (“The End of the USSR,” republished on the WSWS on December 30, 2016).

South Asia—human and social catastrophe and geopolitical tensions

17. South Asian countries are among the worst hit by the coronavirus pandemic. The ruling classes in these countries have exposed the poverty-stricken workers and toilers to the deadly virus, prioritising profit before human lives, like their counterparts around the world. By the end of October 2021, the total of South Asian COVID-19 cases had increased to over 38 million and the official death toll to over 543,000. In response to the mounting social opposition to their criminal policies, the ruling elites across South Asia, from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, to Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Maldives are rapidly shifting toward authoritarian forms of rule.

18. The global human catastrophe of the COVID-19 pandemic has tragically emerged in India. The official death toll on October 25 was 455,093 and the cases stood at 34,200,957. However, the real number of deaths by June, 2021 was between three and five million according to a study made by the US-based Center for Global Development. The study

concluded: “True deaths are likely to be in the several millions, not hundreds of thousands, making this arguably India’s worst human tragedy since partition and independence.”

The far-right government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi reluctantly locked down the country on March 24, 2020, but started reopening the economy after one month, heeding the call of the corporates. It thereby paved the way for a pandemic tsunami. From April to June 2021, at the peak of India’s second Delta-driven wave of the pandemic, India officially recorded around 4,000 daily deaths. Indicating the ruthless herd immunity policy of his regime, Modi infamously declared on April 20, 2021 in a televised address to the nation: “In today’s situation, we have to save the country from lockdown” (“Modi pledges to ‘save India from lockdown’—not infection and death,” WSWS, May 10, 2021). It implied that for the capitalist oligarchy, the deaths of millions can be readily accepted.

19. New Delhi’s brutal class policy has been graphically demonstrated in its disregard for the masses and its steps to boost the profits of the corporate oligarchy. Its ill-prepared lockdown in 2020, with just four hours’ notice, plunged the multi-million working class, including 40 million migrant workers, into an untold crisis of job and income losses without proper social support for the poor. For big businesses, the government committed 20 trillion rupees, or 10 percent of GDP, in the guise of “stimulating” the economy. They were further rewarded with pro-investor reforms. These included new labour laws empowering big employers to dismiss workers and close down factories at will; expanding the contract labour system and making workers’ actions to defend their jobs and working conditions illegal; and three farm laws allowing international and domestic multinationals to dominate agriculture. The Modi regime announced more tax concessions for international investors and a privatisation program in this year’s budget, while further slashing the subsidy programs for the poor.

20. These policies have widened social inequality in India. Oxfam’s “Inequality Virus” report of January 2021 shows that India’s richest 1 percent now owns 15 times more wealth than the bottom 50 percent. India’s 100 top billionaires obscenely profited during the pandemic, amassing \$178 billion more in wealth since the 2020 lockdown of the country. An unskilled worker would take 10,000 years to earn billionaire Mukesh Ambani’s income during just one hour of the pandemic. Another study from 2020 shows that 230 million more people have been pushed below the poverty line during the pandemic.

Last year marked thirty years since the opening of India to capitalist globalisation after the collapse of the national autarchic, state-led development policies the Indian ruling class had pursued since 1947. The Indian National Congress (INC) government and the elite boasted that opening the country for the plunder of international capital would usher in a new era of development and prosperity for the masses. However, the past thirty years have shown this to be a lie—international investors and their Indian counterparts have fattened their profits while intensifying the ruthless exploitation of India’s workers and toilers, creating mass inequality, poverty and malnutrition, which have only deepened during the pandemic.

21. The Modi regime is relentlessly pursuing the Indian elite’s right-wing socio-economic agenda along with its great power ambitions, integrating India into the US economic and strategic offensive against China. It has expanded a web of bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral military-strategic ties, including the Quad, with the US and its principal Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia. New Delhi’s attempt to develop a strategic foothold in Afghanistan has been jeopardised by the US Afghan debacle and because the rival Pakistan-backed Taliban seized power in Kabul. New Delhi is playing a reactionary role in the region to rope smaller countries, such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives, behind Washington’s anti-China offensive. These actions have sharply

escalated the tensions with China. The past two years saw the eruption of on-off border tensions between these two nuclear-armed countries, threatening to trigger a global conflagration. In turn, the Modi regime and the ruling class are using these tensions to divert the growing social anger in the country.

22. The multi-million Indian working class has begun to challenge the right-wing policies of the Hindu supremacist BJP-led regime and the capitalist class. This includes two nationwide general strikes on January 8 and November 26, 2020, and many militant actions in coal mining, the auto industry, public transport, health care, banks and insurance. Workers are bitterly resisting the Modi government's privatisation drive, austerity measures and other pro-investor policies. Worker unrest is rising in plants belonging to international corporations, such as Hyundai, Nissan, Renault, Maruti-Suzuki and Volvo, based in Chennai, Gurgaon and elsewhere. A year-long protest by hundreds of thousands of farmers against the BJP government's pro-agribusiness farm laws, despite the New Delhi regime's repressive actions, was a measure of the depth of the seething social anger in the country. These struggles by workers and toilers are a harbinger of an impending social explosion as part of the global resurgence of class struggles.

23. The SEP (Sri Lanka) and the WSWs intervened in these developing struggles in India, elaborating the Marxist-Trotskyist program. In a significant intervention, the SEP in Sri Lanka organised an online meeting with its sister parties of the ICFI in the US, Canada and France, under the theme of "The COVID-19 pandemic in India and the need for a socialist strategy" on May 30, 2021. It called for a science-based response to the pandemic in India against the "herd immunity" policies of the Modi government and ruling elite. Urging Indian workers to organisationally and politically break from the Stalinist parties and nationalist unions and form independent rank-and-file committees to fight for their rights, the meeting insisted: "Indian workers must fight to unify their struggles with their class brothers and sisters across South Asia, including in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, and in the imperialist centres of North America and Europe. To this end, they should support the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which was established by the ICFI to provide workers with a new international socialist channel to coordinate and unify their struggles on a worldwide basis."

24. The Modi government is rapidly driving toward dictatorial rule to take on the growing class struggles. It is suppressing political and social opponents and human right activists, while curbing the internet and social media. The BJP-led government is stirring anti-Muslim hysteria by adopting draconian laws, such as the anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act, and implementing authoritarian constitutional measures and military actions in Kashmir, while nurturing Hindutva fascist goons to unleash against the working class.

25. The Indian opposition parties have no fundamental differences with the Modi government's ruinous pandemic policy, authoritarian moves, ratcheting up of tensions with China and Pakistan, and burgeoning military-strategic relations with the US. The INC, the Stalinist Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the regional bourgeois parties that run many of India's state governments are also responsible for the free run of the pandemic disaster.

26. In order to deflect and suppress the mounting social opposition, the Left Front led by the CPM is cementing its alliance with the INC. After contesting a series of state elections in alliance with the INC, the Left Front is preparing to broaden the front for the 2024 national elections. The Stalinist-led unions, lining up with other unions, are actively intervening to scuttle working-class struggles. When they are compelled to call strikes and protests these unions use their weight to contain and prevent them challenging the capitalist system. The Stalinists' opposition to the independent mobilisation of working class, rallying the multi-million

peasants and oppressed against the Modi regime and capitalism, has been graphically shown in the peasant agitation. Allying with the Congress, the Stalinist parties sought to keep the working class a passive bystander and stressed that the farmers' protest must remain "non political."

27. Maoist tendencies in India and other South Asian countries are also opposed to the mobilisation of the working class as an independent political force. Maoism, a variant of Stalinism, is represented in India mainly by the various off-shoots of the Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist (CPI-ML) and the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). Both preach the Stalinist two-stage theory of revolution. The first stage is "bourgeois democratic revolution" against the pro-imperialist comprador bourgeoisie and feudal landlords, in which the working class must form an alliance with the so-called "progressive" national bourgeoisie; meanwhile, the struggle for the second stage, socialist revolution, is postponed to the indefinite future. In effect, the struggle for socialism is off the agenda. The CPI-ML has joined the political establishment and like the CPM-led Left Front is acting mostly in alliance with the INC or regional bourgeois parties. The CPI-Maoist organises adventurist armed attacks on the same two-stage line. In Nepal, the Maoist Communist Party changed its battle fatigues to join the ruling elite. In Sri Lanka, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which claimed allegiance to Maoism, has been transformed into an obedient tool of bourgeois rule.

28. The governments and the ruling class of the other countries of South Asia have similarly abandoned the masses to the pandemic. In Pakistan, the military-backed regime of Prime Minister Imran Khan was among the last to even lock down the country and among the first to reopen the economy. State violence was unleashed on workers who were demanding basic health and safety facilities like PPE (personal protective equipment). During the pandemic, ten million more Pakistanis have been added to the 50 million people already living in wrenching poverty. As social opposition mounted against his government, Khan increased the role of the military—which is notorious for its long record of coups and dictatorship—in the economy and the administration. In Bangladesh, the pandemic is wreaking havoc as deaths have risen to over 27,000. According to a recent World Bank report, 68 percent of workers in the capital Dhaka and the port city of Chittagong lost their jobs during the pandemic. Another estimate suggested that garment workers' job losses might go over one million by last December. Prime Minister Sheik Hasina is strengthening autocratic rule while unleashing police violence to curb opposition against attacks on social and democratic rights.

29. The crisis intensified by the pandemic has once again proved the historical inviability of the states created in 1947–1948 in South Asia under so-called independence. This state system was set up as part of the post-war settlement between the imperialist powers and the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy with the connivance of the national bourgeoisie. The Indian subcontinent was partitioned on communal lines into a Hindu-dominated India and an expressly Muslim Pakistan. Sri Lanka was established as a separate state. The only way out for the multi-million workers and poor in South Asia is to overthrow these reactionary states and the rule of the bourgeoisie and establish a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia as part of a world socialist federation.

Next: Part two



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