

Greetings from the ICFI to the SEP (Australia) 2022 Congress

The crisis of bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka and the tasks of the SEP

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These remarks were delivered by Deepal Jayasekera to the Sixth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), held from September 24 to 27, 2022. Jayasekera is the general secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka, which is the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

On behalf of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka, I am bringing the warmest revolutionary greetings to your 6th National Congress. I would like to express my full agreement with all four resolutions and the reports for the congress.

The resolutions, reports and discussion in this congress, which are firmly based on international socialist program and perspectives of the ICFI [International Committee of the Fourth International], are important parts of the ICFI's political and theoretical struggles to build an international movement of the working class against imperialist war, austerity and dictatorship.

The changed objective political situation globally and the crucial role of the IC [International Committee] and its sections under those conditions, as explained in the opening report delivered by Comrade Cheryl Crisp and referred to by most comrades, are sharply expressed in Sri Lanka.

Bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka is in an immense economic, political and social crisis as a part of the growing global crisis of capitalism, greatly intensified by the pandemic and US-NATO war against Russia.

A popular uprising of workers, youth and rural toilers, which started in early April against then government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse, over unbearable conditions, including the scarcity and skyrocketing prices of essentials like fuel, food and medicines and hours-long power cuts, forced Rajapakse to resign on July 15. The working class played a central role in this uprising with millions participating in three general strikes on April 28, May 6 and May 10.

None of burning issues confronting the working class and oppressed masses that led to their uprising have been resolved. The new president, Ranil Wickremesinghe, from the right-wing, pro-US United National Party (UNP), who was installed by the widely discredited parliament after Rajapakse resigned, has unleashed further austerity measures on the working class, in line with dictates from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the pre-condition for a promised emergency loan facility.

At the same time, the Wickremesinghe government has intensified its state repression against anti-government protesters, arresting thousands, including prominent activists who were involved in the main protest site at Galle Face Green in Colombo. Thousands have been detained in various prisons and detention centres. Draconian repressive laws, including the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), have been used to detain them. Protests by students and youth have been repeatedly subjected to brutal police attacks, with dozens arrested in the past weeks.

Marking a new stage in this state repression, Wickremesinghe has declared several areas in and around Colombo, including around the Presidential Secretariat and Presidential Palace, Prime Minister's Office and Official Residence, the Parliament Complex and the Courts Complex, as "high security zones," banning public gatherings and processions in those specified areas. Police officers have been given wide powers to inspect, investigate and arrest any person suspected of violating those provisions in these zones. It is obvious that these new measures are aimed at cracking down on protests by workers, youth and rural masses.

The real target of this repression is the working class, which will definitely come into struggle against the IMF-dictated austerity measures aimed at making working people pay for the of severe economic crisis in Sri Lanka as part of the deepening global crisis of capitalism. These measures include the restructuring and privatisation of public sector institutions that will lead to the slashing of jobs, wages and working conditions; further deep cuts to public expenses, including for health and education; and increased taxes on working people and the widening of tax nets to broader sections of workers.

The opposition of workers, particularly in public sector enterprises targeted for restructuring, is growing. Workers in firms like the Petroleum Corporation have already engaged in protests. Fearing the re-emergence of working class struggles, the Wickremesinghe government is preparing for class war.

These developments have vindicated the principled political intervention the SEP has been carrying out within the anti-government popular uprising since the very beginning. In a major statement on April 7, the SEP supported the working people's demand for the resignation of Rajapakse, but raised the question: "What is to replace him? It is not enough to demand Rajapakse's

removal.” The statement explained that “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.”

The SEP called on workers to form their own action committees, completely independent of all unions and bourgeois parties, in every workplace, factory, plantations and neighbourhood to fight for their basic needs. The statement also advocated a “program and policies to animate the work of the Action Committees and address the pressing needs of the masses.” These included the cancellation of the debt of small farmers, fishermen, small industrialists and businessmen; workers’ democratic control over the production and distribution of all essential items and other resources critical for the lives of people; nationalization of the banks, big corporations, plantations and other major economic nerve centres, the repudiation of all foreign debts, and no to the austerity demands of the IMF and World Bank.

We have explained the need to develop the struggle of the working class, organized through action committees, on these policies, rallying poor peasants and other oppressed masses in the fight for a government of workers and peasants committed to the program of socialist internationalism. The SEP has pointed out that the fight of the Sri Lankan working class is a part of broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally, to be conducted with the unity of their class brothers in South Asia and globally.

The SEP is the only political party that has intervened in the anti-government popular uprising, fighting to independently mobilize the working class on a revolutionary socialist program and perspective. We have done this in a political struggle against all the parties of bourgeois political establishment, including the so-called opposition parties—the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and their pseudo-left hangers on like Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) and trade union agents.

The SEP has a unique record of continuously intervening within the mass movement of workers, youth and rural toilers, under its own party name, circulating copies of party statements among them, directly challenging the anti-democratic “no politics” directive issued by organizers of the main protest site at Galle Face Green in Colombo. Their real aim was to exclude revolutionary socialist politics on which the working class needs to base themselves in its struggle against bourgeois rule.

In a major strategic initiative, the SEP has launched a campaign to build a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses. As explained in its party statement on July 20, in opposition to calls for a new interim capitalist government, this congress aims to take the political initiative into hands of the working class and not leave it to the bourgeoisie, which will have dangerous consequences for the working people and oppressed masses.

At this moment, I want to pay my special tribute to comrade Wijaya Dias for his six decades of dedicated struggle to the program and the perspective of international socialism in general and in particular to his central role in the preparation of this important party document, which was a major contribution during his last

days.

The July 20 statement declared: “The SEP envisages this Congress of the exploited labouring masses as a revolutionary political alternative to the reactionary capitalist interim government being set up by the discredited parliamentary cronies of Gotabhaya Rajapakse and Ranil Wickremesinghe—his successor as executive president and would-be autocrat. The new government of the ruling class has only one purpose: to impose the brutal austerity program demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), US and European imperialism and the Sri Lankan ruling class, while strangling popular opposition.”

To lay the foundations for this congress, the SEP has called on workers and rural toilers to build their own independent action committees in every workplace, factory, plantation, neighbourhood and rural area to fight for their democratic and social rights. What the action committees advocate are diametrically opposed to so-called Peoples Councils promoted by pseudo-left FSP to pressurize a bourgeois interim government for concessions.

The working class should respond to moves by the ruling class, its state apparatus and the military to intensify their repression by waging the intransigent defence of the democratic rights through their action committees. The defence of democratic rights is inseparably connected to the struggle for socialist demands and the seizure of power from the bourgeois ruling class.

The SEP statement explained that the call for “a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses provides a political strategy for the working class to consolidate its forces, win the active support of the rural masses and lay the basis for its own rule through a workers’ and peasants’ government committed to restructuring society on socialist lines.” This struggle is part of the broader political fight for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

The most crucial task in this political struggle is building of the SEP as the mass revolutionary party of Sri Lankan working class and sections of IC throughout South Asia, particularly in India.



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