

The struggle for a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses in Sri Lanka

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2 May 2023

This is the report delivered by Deepal Jayasekera, the General Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka, to the 2023 International May Day Online Rally held on April 30. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

Dear Comrades,

As a result of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the South Asian region is increasingly being affected by the growing danger of world war. In addition to the escalation of war against Russia, the US is intensifying its war preparations against China. Under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has been transformed into a frontline state of the US war drive against China.

The US and India are aggressively working to integrate the countries of South Asia, including Sri Lanka, into their military-strategic offensive against China. The whole South Asian region is increasingly being dragged into the vortex of intensifying geopolitical tensions, which could lead to a nuclear Third World War. These developments make it necessary for workers in South Asia to join with their counterparts around the world in the campaign waged by the ICFI to build an international anti-war movement based on socialist policies.

Within the context of the global crisis of capitalism, intensified by the US-NATO war against Russia, the political situation in Sri Lanka has reached a decisive turning point. The offensive by the government of President Ranil Wickremesinghe on the basic social and democratic rights of Sri Lanka's workers, youth and rural poor has reached a new stage, with the approval of the \$2.9 billion bailout loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Last year, a popular uprising in which the working class played the central role, ousted the Rajapakse government. Wickremesinghe, his successor, is carrying out what Rajapakse failed to do due to popular opposition to the harsh IMF-dictated austerity measures. The working class is entering into struggles against the Wickremesinghe government in defense of their social rights.

The Wickremesinghe government is intensifying state repression, aiming for a crackdown on these developing struggles of the working class. He has imposed essential service orders outlawing strikes and other class actions by workers in several public sector enterprises.

The Wickremesinghe government deployed the military to break a strike by petroleum workers against privatization. It also sent 20 strikers, mainly union leaders, on compulsory leave. These measures are a grave warning to the entire working class on what will be its response to any such strike against IMF austerity.

The Wickremesinghe government replaced the existing Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and passed a new, more draconian, Anti-Terror Bill (ATB). Successive governments have used the PTA against their political opponents and against workers, youth, and rural poor in order to suppress their struggles.

Now, the crisis of bourgeois rule and the developments in the class struggle have reached new levels. The government knows that the PTA is not enough and a much more draconian repressive law is needed. Hence, the new ATB. This new legislation will give wide powers to the president to unleash state power to brutally suppress any opposition to the government's policies, including IMF-enforced

austerity.

The Wickremesinghe government is intensifying its class war against the working class.

For defending their basic social rights, the working class is coming into struggle against the government's austerity measures, resulting in a head on collision with the government. What is developing in Sri Lanka is a revolutionary conflict between the working class and bourgeois ruling class.

The working class needs to prepare politically, theoretically and organizationally for this conflict.

The bourgeois opposition parties, mainly the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), have no fundamental differences with the Wickremesinghe government over its economic policy, whatever criticisms they make. In the same way as the government, they are committed to the IMF austerity program.

The real concern of the SJB and JVP is that the Wickremesinghe government is incapable of implementing IMF austerity while suppressing popular opposition. Thus, they intend to form their own government and carry out the IMF program by brutally suppressing popular opposition.

The SEP is intervening in these sharp political developments against all parties of the bourgeois political establishment and their trade union and pseudo-left agents, such as the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), by advancing a revolutionary socialist alternative for the working class.

In the mid-July protests last year, during the popular uprising against the previous Rajapakse government, the SEP launched a campaign to build a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses (DSC). This campaign is continuing. We have centered our campaign on opposing the brutal assault by the government against workers, including against their social and democratic rights.

This new strategic initiative was announced in an SEP statement published on July 20, 2022. We explained that the aim of our campaign is to build the DSC, an independent political movement of the working class, rallying rural poor to establish a government of workers and peasants based on socialist internationalist policies.

The decisive lessons to be drawn from last year's popular uprising are to challenge bourgeois rule, which

has become intolerable for the working people. The working class needs an independent political program and strategy. The trade unions, acting as open agents of the government and bosses, aim to suppress workers' growing struggles. The lesson that workers must draw from their bitter experience with the unions is that the fight for their social and democratic rights requires the formation of their own rank-and-file action committees.

We are fighting to build the DSC, which will be based on democratically elected representatives from these action committees throughout the island.

Our struggle to build an independent political movement of the working class is done in coordination with the IYSSE and bound up with the campaign launched by the ICFI to build an international mass movement of workers and youth against imperialist war.

When the working class enters into struggle against the austerity measures of the government, including strikes and protests, the trade unions and pseudo-lefts like the FSP work together to derail this movement by attempting to trap them within the bourgeois parliamentary framework, as they did during last year's popular uprising. They are working as the main obstacle against the working class, which is fighting for their basic democratic and social rights.

The aim of the DSC is to establish a government of workers and peasants, to develop a mass independent political movement of the working class. The struggle to build a government of workers and peasants will be part of a broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

We urge workers, youth, intellectuals and rural poor to join us in establishing a government of workers and peasants and to bring forward this campaign, to build a DSC and join the SEP.

Thank you, Comrades.



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