

The struggle for international socialism in South Asia

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The following speech was given by Deepal Jayasekera, General Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka), at the International May Day 2024 Online Rally, held Saturday, May 4.

The developing danger of a nuclear World War III, intensified by the ongoing imperialist-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, associated developments towards a broader war in Middle East, the escalating US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the US war preparations against China, is very much shaping the political situation in Sri Lanka, India and South Asia as a whole.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has transformed India into a frontline state of the US war drive against China. In line with India's military-strategic partnership with the US and close ties with Tel Aviv, the Modi government, from the outset, has fully supported Israel's genocide in Gaza.

India is collaborating with the US to integrate countries in South Asia, including Sri Lanka, into their military-strategic offensive against China. As a result, 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. The basic political conclusion workers and youth in South Asia need to draw from these developments is the need to build an international anti-war movement based on socialist policies, which is being led by the ICFI.

Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP aim to come to power for a third consecutive term in the upcoming general elections in India, with the blessing of powerful sections of the Indian ruling elite, local and foreign big business, the corporate media and of course the US and other imperialist powers. They intend to ruthlessly continue with pro-investor economic reform measures and further develop India's strategic partnership with the US, while establishing fascistic rule based on Hindu chauvinism to brutally crackdown on the inevitable

struggles of workers, youth and the rural poor against these policies.

However, the opposition alliance, India National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), led by the Congress Party and comprised of various regional bourgeois parties and Stalinists—the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—has no fundamentally different economic and foreign policies from Modi's BJP. INDIA alliance is committed to the same economic reform policies and the India-US strategic partnership.

Therefore, the Indian working class has no choice in this general election. They must reject all these parties of the bourgeois political establishment, including the Stalinists. They need to mobilise themselves as an independent political movement, rallying the rural poor, in the fight for a workers' government which will be committed to socialist policies. This must be part of the broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

Responding to increasing pressure from India and the US, the Sri Lankan government of President Ranil Wickremesinghe is working to closely integrate Sri Lanka into the US-India war drive against China. At the end of April, the US and Sri Lankan navies conducted bilateral joint exercises off the coast of Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka.

The Wickremesinghe government has also supported Israel's genocide in Gaza since early October. Earlier this year, it sent a naval ship to the Red Sea to join the US-led coalition, supposedly to protect commercial ships from attacks by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

At the same time, the Wickremesinghe government is going to intensify its harsh austerity measures, dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), by restructuring or privatizing over 400 State Owned Enterprises (SOE). This move will destroy about half a million jobs, slash wages, cut working conditions and further hike utility

prices like electricity and water to unbearably high levels.

The working class is coming into struggle against this brutal assault of the Wickremesinghe government on their social rights. Early this year, tens of thousands of workers of the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) held a three-day strike and protests against the government's privatization plans.

The Wickremesinghe government is intensifying state repression and aims to crack down on these developing struggles of the working class, including essential service orders outlawing strikes and other class actions by workers in several public sector enterprises, deploying the military to break strikes, and the suspension of workers for taking industrial actions. The Wickremesinghe government is intensifying the class war against the working class.

The bourgeois opposition parties, including the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), have no fundamental differences with the Wickremesinghe government over its economic policy. They are committed to the same IMF austerity program and would continue it just as ruthlessly if they come to power in a future election, also brutally cracking down on the opposition of workers, youths and rural poor.

The trade unions, with the help of pseudo-left organizations like the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), function as a bulwark to block an independent political movement of the working class against the Wickremesinghe government's assault on their social and democratic rights, as they did during the mass uprising in 2022 which brought down the Rajapakse government.

The crucial political lesson the working class must draw from the experience of the 2022 mass uprising is the need for a revolutionary socialist leadership and perspective to secure their victory against the ruling class onslaught. Although the mass uprising was able to force then-president Gotabhaya Rajapakse to resign and flee the country and his government to collapse, the ruling elite had a respite by elevating Wickremesinghe to the presidency. The working class unable to implement its own socialist solution to the crisis due to a lack of revolutionary leadership and perspective.

As part of its broader attacks on democratic rights, the Wickremesinghe government has decided to impose a 52-fold increase in the security deposit for presidential candidates of recognized political parties to 2.6 million rupees, while raising this fee for independent candidates from 75,000 rupees to 3.1 million rupees. Deposits for other elections are also to be increased several-fold. The

aim of this move is to marginalize political opponents in general and socialist opposition, i.e., the SEP, in particular.

In response to the ruling class offensive on the social and democratic rights of the working class, including this latest move by the Wickremesinghe government, the SEP has launched an ambitious program of developing our party's political and theoretical works and building the party itself, including a party-building fund of 3.5 million rupees, as well as a recruiting drive for the party and the IYSSE, developing our coverage for the WSWS and our publication of Marxist-Trotskyist literature in Sinhala and Tamil.

At the same time, the SEP is continuing its campaign to build a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses (DSC), which we initiated in mid-July 2022 during the mass uprising. We call on workers to form their own action committees at every workplace, factory, plantation and neighborhood, independent of the union bureaucracies and all bourgeois parties. Such committees must also be formed by the rural poor in their areas. The DSC will be based on democratically elected delegates from such action committees.

Through building the DSC, the SEP is developing its struggle to independently mobilize the working class in a political movement, rallying the rural poor and youth, based on international socialism, to overthrow bourgeois rule and establish a government of workers and peasants. This is part of a broader struggle for socialism internationally, in which the SEP is closely collaborating with our sister parties in the ICFI.

I call upon workers, youths, rural poor and socialist-minded intellectuals to join with the SEP in taking forward this crucial political struggle.



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