

Sri Lankan election: The pro-capitalist program of the Frontline Socialist Party charlatans

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The fake-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) is running a candidate in the presidential election to be held in Sri Lanka on September 21. For all its radical posturing, the FSP makes no mention of the accelerating drive by US imperialism to a third world war and seeks to dupe working people into believing that the deepening attacks on democratic and social rights can be resolved within the capitalist system and the framework of discredited electoral politics.

In opposition to the FSP, the Socialist Equality Party is fighting to win the working class to a socialist and internationalist program against war, austerity and autocratic methods of rule. We call on workers to vote for our candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena to demonstrate their support for our program, but above all to mobilise independently of all the bourgeois parties and their trade unions to fight for socialist policies to put an end to the immense social crisis facing working people and to join in building a unified international anti-war movement.

The FSP is politically hostile to any independent movement of the working class that threatens bourgeois rule. It postures as the continuation of the 2022 mass uprising that forced President Gotabaya Rajapakse to flee the country and resign. The FSP has formed an alliance with other petty-bourgeois organisations, called the People's Struggle Alliance (PSA), that were prominent in the mass protests in Colombo. Because the PSA lacks official status, the FSP candidate Nuwan Bopage is standing under the name of one of its allies, the Socialist People's Forum (SPF).

The FSP's claim to embody the aspirations of the 2022 mass movement is a warning to working people. It does not represent the interests of the millions of workers, young people and poor who took to the streets in opposition to the social devastation being unleashed following the country's debt default, but rather those political forces that dominated the uprising and betrayed it.

In the midst of the 2022 upheavals, the FSP, its allies and the treacherous trade unions worked might and main to limit the mass movement, particularly strikes by the working class, and subordinate it to the call for an "interim government"—that is, a capitalist government of the opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). By blocking any independent movement of the working class, the FSP facilitated the parliamentary manoeuvres that enabled the anti-democratic installation of the reviled Ranil Wickremesinghe into the powerful executive presidency.

The result has been social devastation for broad layers of working people as the Wickremesinghe regime has imposed the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in return for a bail-out loan. Prices

have skyrocketed as subsidies have been slashed. Jobs and working conditions have been destroyed to prepare for a wholesale fire-sale of state-owned enterprises. Essential services such as education, health and welfare have been systematically undermined. Wickremesinghe has resorted to draconian police-state measures against any opposition to his austerity program.

The SJB and JVP-led National People's Power (NPP) would have done exactly the same if they had been part of an "interim government." Both parties are standing candidates in the presidential election and indeed are the frontrunners. Both are also pledged to continue to implement the IMF's agenda and will be just as ruthless as Wickremesinghe in suppressing strikes and protests.

Well aware of the mass hostility to the harsh IMF agenda, the FSP is attempting to posture as its opponent. Its *People's Manifesto* promotes an "Exit IMF strategy." Instead of dealing with the IMF, it calls for "direct negotiations with creditors" to extract concessions on loan repayments and "a legal audit report through study of Sri Lanka's situation by an internationally-recognised debt auditing and grading agency."

This would be truly out of the frying pan into the fire. Rather than trying to negotiate with the IMF, which has insisted that its demands be implemented to the letter, the FSP proposes to go begging bowl in hand to the creditors that the IMF represents. Moreover, it wants to pay one of the notorious multi-billion dollar auditing agencies, such as PricewaterhouseCooper or KPMG, that act on behalf of international finance capital to come up with recommendations as to what is to be done.

The FSP's proposal for making futile appeals to international bankers is a policy of accepting the authority of global finance capital. We can predict the outcome of this farcical exercise in advance. Whatever concessions are offered, if any, will be to try to obscure the fact that working people are going to be made to pay for debts accumulated by successive Sri Lankan governments during their 30-year brutal communal war against the Tamil minority and to boost, in one way or another, the profits of big business and foreign investors.

Workers should draw the necessary lessons from the treacherous role played by the pseudo-left Syriza government in Greece. Like the FSP, the "Coalition of the Radical Left" or Syriza, prior to its election in 2015, repeatedly declared its complete rejection of the EU's austerity demands. Like the FSP, Syriza claimed that Greece's economic and social crisis could be resolved within the framework of capitalism. In office, however, Syriza immediately jettisoned its

election promises, bowed to the demands of international finance capital and over the next four years laid waste to the essential services, pensions, jobs, working conditions and wages of the Greek working class.

The SEP insists that the working class can defend its interests only on the basis of a program that challenges the prerogatives of international finance capital and seeks the overthrow of the profit system. We demand not the renegotiation of the debt mountain, but its complete repudiation. To fight for that policy, we call for the building of independent workers' action committees and the convening of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Poor (DSC) of their delegates to discuss and implement a strategy to oppose the IMF dictates on the basis of socialist policies.

To combat international finance capital and the global corporate conglomerates, workers in Sri Lanka need to unify with their class brothers and sisters around the world who face similar attacks on their living conditions.

The FSP's policies in 2022 and now are not simply political mistakes but flow directly from its class orientation and program. It speaks for sections of the upper middle class, not the working class. As a result, its manifesto incessantly refers to the "people," not to workers or the working class. Its call for a "people's front" seeks to subordinate the working class to a front of middle class and bourgeois parties and organisations.

Theoretically, the FSP, which broke away from the JVP in 2011, remains rooted in that party's ideological amalgam of Maoism, Castroism and Sinhala populism—in particular in the Stalinist/Maoist two-stage theory. The two parts of its manifesto plainly set this out—the immediate tasks and short-term program, and "our socialist principled foundation."

The first stage subordinates the working class to an alliance with the "progressive" bourgeoisie to undertake immediate bourgeois democratic tasks and supposedly alleviate the lot of working class, while socialism is relegated to a distant second stage. In reality, as the history of the 20th century has repeatedly demonstrated, the "progressive" bourgeoisie, terrified of any revolutionary movement of the working class, invariably turns on workers and the poor with tragic consequences.

In line with the two-stage theory, the FSP manifesto calls for the "democratisation" of the state structure as part of its short-term program, explicitly declaring that this is "not a socialist state structure itself." However, the democratisation of the capitalist state is a reactionary utopia.

Ever since formal independence in 1948, the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie has resorted to anti-democratic methods and police-state repression to maintain its rule. The first government abolished the citizenship rights of Tamil plantation workers, and anti-Tamil chauvinism and pogroms led to the eruption of the protracted civil war in 1983. The opposition parties to which the FSP appeals—the SJB and JVP—along with the entire Colombo political establishment are steeped in divisive communal politics. Now under conditions of immense economic and social crisis, the ruling class will not hesitate to whip up communalism and resort to dictatorial forms of rule.

Significantly, when launching the FSP's manifesto, its candidate Bopage criticised the Wickremesinghe government for its "total subordination to India" and "losing independence." This recalls the anti-Indian and anti-Tamil chauvinism of its parent party, the JVP, which engaged in a fascist rebellion in 1988-89 against the Indo-Lanka Accord that brought Indian "peacekeepers" into the north of

the island to disarm the Tamil separatist LTTE. JVP gunmen shot and killed workers, trade union leaders and politicians, including members of the SEP, who opposed its chauvinist campaign. The FSP has never repudiated these vile communal politics.

In opposition to the two-stage theory, Leon Trotsky explained in his Theory of Permanent Revolution that the national bourgeoisie in countries of belated capitalist development, such as Sri Lanka, is organically incapable of fulfilling the basic social and democratic aspirations of the working class and oppressed masses. Those tasks fall to the working class, rallying the rural poor, in the struggle for power to overthrow capitalism in the socialist revolution.

Today, such is the crisis of global capitalism, that not just backward countries but the so-called advanced imperialism powers are turning to far-right, anti-democratic forms of rule—above all, in the United States, where the contenders in the presidential election are the fascistic Donald Trump and the warmongering Kamala Harris. Around the world, the struggle for democratic rights is completely bound up with the struggle by the working class for socialism.

The FSP calls for the democratisation of parliament through the building of "people's councils" to put pressure on the government and parliament. This is nothing but a program of class collaboration. Those that will dominate in such "people's councils" will be the representatives of sections of the bourgeoisie and upper middle classes.

The SEP calls for workers to take matters into their own hands to assert their own independent strength. We advocate the formation of action committees in every workplace, factory and plantation, independent of all capitalist parties and their trade union flunkies. In opposition to parliament, the SEP calls for the establishment of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Poor, comprised of democratically-elected delegates of action committees of workers and rural toilers, to determine and implement a political and industrial strategy to defend their democratic and social rights.

In these action committees, the SEP advocates for a series of demands to meet the pressing needs of working people: Reject IMF-dictated austerity, repudiate all foreign debt, no to the privatisation/restructuring of public sector enterprises, proper living wages for all workers indexed to the cost-of-living, and put the big corporations, plantations, major banks and other economic nerve centres under the democratic control of the working class.

None of these demands can be carried out within the framework of capitalism or on a national basis. The establishment of a Democratic and Socialist Congress poses the necessity of capitalism's overthrow and the establishment of a workers' and peasants' government to reconstruct society along socialist lines. This has to be part of a broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.



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