Vote Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lankan presidential election

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
17 September 2024

The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers, youth and the rural poor to vote for our candidate, Pani Wijesiriwardena—our party symbol is the scissors—in the presidential election on September 21, to express your support for our program and the perspective of socialist internationalism.

Only the SEP tells the truth to the working class and oppressed masses: the burning issues you confront—growing poverty, unemployment, deepening social inequality and the assault on basic democratic rights—cannot be solved within the framework of capitalism or the confines of the nation state.

This is true above all of the emerging world war between nuclear-armed powers. US imperialism has already instigated and backed wars on two fronts—against Russia in Ukraine and Israel's genocide in Gaza that is expanding across the Middle East. At the time, it is making advanced preparations to open up a third front against China—all in a desperate bid to shore up American global dominance.

None of the other candidates has said a word about the growing danger to humanity of a nuclear holocaust. They want to keep the masses in the dark. Whoever wins the election will, in one way or another, continue the policy of the Wickremesinghe government in integrating the island into Washington's war plans.

The SEP as the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of Fourth International collaborates with other sections in building a unified anti-war movement of the international working class to abolish capitalism and its division of the world into rival nation states which is the root cause of war.

We fight for the independent mobilisation of the working class, rallying the rural poor, in a revolutionary movement to overthrow bourgeois rule and establish a government of workers and peasants committed to reorganising society along socialist lines. Only in that way can the scourges of war, austerity and dictatorship be abolished.

In the political struggle to unite the working class, the SEP opposes all forms of nationalism, communalism and racism. We advocate the establishment of a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as part of the fight for socialism throughout South Asia and internationally.

The leading bourgeois candidates in this election—President Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party (UNP), Sajith Premadasa of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the National People's Power (NPP) led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—have told voters a pack of lies about improving the living conditions of working people. If elected, each would quickly tear up their false promises and impose harsh new measures to meet the demands of international finance capital.

While making promises to the masses they know they cannot keep, all these capitalist representatives have reassured big business and foreign investors that they will defend their profit interests. All three are committed to implementing the International Monetary Fund's conditions for its $US3 billion bailout loan. These include savage cuts to essential services such as public health and education, the privatisation/restructuring of over 400 state-owned enterprises and the destruction of half a million public sector jobs.

The Wickremesinghe government has begun the process, but the bulk of the IMF's demands remain to be implemented. All talk of renegotiating easier terms with the IMF loan by the NPP/JVP and others is a fraud. In the midst of the worst eruption of global capitalist crisis since the 1930s, the next capitalist government in Sri Lanka has no choice but to impose heavy new burdens on working people, already hard hit by soaring prices, job losses and the lack of essential services.

The working class and oppressed masses will not tolerate the imposition of even harsher austerity measures. We warn that the response of the next government will inevitably be to resort to anti-democratic laws and the police, army and goon squads to violently suppress strikes and protests. The turn to dictatorial forms of rule, already evident under Wickremesinghe, will only intensify.

The SEP is standing in the election to prepare the working class for the class battles ahead. In doing so, it is necessary to learn the political lessons of the 2022 uprising of strikes and mass protests that drove former President Gotabhaya Rajapakse from power. While the movement revealed the enormous strength of the working class, it also exposed its political weaknesses. Protesting workers and poor were led by the nose by the trade unions and fake lefts such as the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) who proclaimed that an "interim government" including the SJB and NPP/JVP would solve all problems. The result was the anti-democratic installation of Wickremesinghe and social devastation.

While seeking to direct the mass movement to parliament and the capitalist opposition parties, the FSP and other petty-bourgeois lefts were bitterly opposed to the SEP. Their slogan of "no politics" was above all an attempt to exclude the revolutionary socialist politics of the SEP. Defying their censorship, the SEP

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continuously campaigned among striking and protesting workers, youth and the rural poor for a politically independent movement based on a socialist and internationalist perspective.

Wave after wave of strikes and protests over the past two years have been limited, isolated and betrayed by the trade unions acting on behalf of their affiliated capitalist parties. We warn in particular about the role of the JVP-led unions which have not only been prominent in selling out strikes, but have followed the JVP's diktat to shut down all industrial action prior to the election to help the NPP/JVP into power. Whoever wins the election, this demonstrates that the JVP unions will vigorously suppress opposition to the IMF agenda as the NPP/JVP seeks to prove its worth to the ruling class.

The FSP will also play a filthy political role in attempting to derail the opposition of workers, youth and rural toilers. Its leading member Nuwan Bopage is standing as the candidate of the People's Struggle Alliance (PSA)—an opportunist collection of similar fake-left bankrupts. Its manifesto is another version of the reactionary Stalinist two-stage—first an alliance with the "progressive" bourgeoisie for immediate tasks, and only in the distant future, the fight for socialism.

As Leon Trotsky demonstrated in his Theory of Permanent Revolution over a century ago, in countries like Sri Lanka there is no "progressive" wing of the bourgeoisie committed to democratic and social rights—all are deeply hostile to any mass movement of the working class. Today around the world, including in the US, the ruling classes are turning to autocratic rule and fascism. The result of the FSP's chasing after non-existent "progressive" bourgeois parties in 2022 was Wickremesinghe. In any new uprising, we warn that the FSP's political road will lead to far worse.

As it has done in every crisis in the past, the Sri Lankan ruling class and its parties will resort to Sinhala racism, directed against Tamils and Muslims, in an effort to divide the working class. The SEP calls on the working class to emphatically reject this political poison. The masses in Sri Lanka cannot afford to be dragged into another fratricidal 26-year war that devastated the island and left hundreds of thousands dead and many more injured and maimed.

The SEP and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League, have a long record of opposing the racist anti-Tamil war and defending the democratic rights of Tamils and Muslims. But we also oppose the communal politics of the Tamil elites which in the present election are especially foul. While Tamil workers and rural toilers suffer alongside their Sinhala and Muslim class brothers and sisters, the myriad Tamil capitalist parties—ITAK, PLOTE, TELO, EPRLF, TPNA and others—whatever their tactical differences, have a single aim: to beg and pressure the next Colombo government for greater powers and privileges for the Tamil elites at the expense of Tamil working people.

Against all the parties of bourgeois political establishment and their fake-left and trade union agents, the SEP calls on workers to strike out independently on a new political road to defend their democratic and social rights.

Build action committees at every workplace, factory, plantation and neighbourhood, entirely independent of all capitalist parties and their trade unions! Assist in the formation of action committees among the rural poor to fight alongside the working class!

The SEP in Sri Lanka has already begun to forge action committees as part of the ICFI's campaign to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to unify the working class around the world.

The SEP advocates the following demands:

No to the IMF austerity! Repudiate all foreign debts!

Nationalise banks, big companies and plantations under the democratic control of the working class!

Place all state-owned enterprises targeted for privatisation under the democratic control of workers!

Subsidies and social programs for rural farmers and the needy!

For the unity of the working class! Reject all forms of communalism and nationalism! Defend the democratic rights of all sections of the downtrodden!

Abolish the executive presidency!

While the SEP stands in elections to promote its socialist and internationalist program, we reject the fatal illusion that the working class can advance its interests through parliament and the capitalist state. Working people need their own organisations to formulate and implement a plan of action to fight for their class interests in opposition to intrigues and plans of all factions of the bourgeoisie.

In the course of the 2022 uprising, the SEP initiated the call for a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses comprised of democratically-elected delegates from action committees of workers and rural poor. That call takes on a burning urgency today. If the working class leaves the political initiative in the hands of the ruling class and its parties, it can only result in disaster.

We say if you agree with our program then act now.

Vote for the SEP and our candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena to show your political support!

Voting is important but by itself will resolve nothing. Begin to establish an action committee where you live or work! Contact the SEP if you need political help!

If you are a youth at school and university, join the International Youth and Students for Socialist Equality (IYSSE)! If no branch exists where you are, contact the IYSSE and build one!

Study our history and program and read the *World Socialist Web Site* so that you can educate yourself and others politically for the battles ahead!

Above all, apply to join the SEP and to build it as the mass revolutionary party of the working class necessary to fight for a workers' and peasants' government and socialist policies!

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To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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