

Leading SEP candidates contesting the Sri Lankan parliamentary elections

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is proud to announce the candidates who are leading our slates contesting the scheduled November 14 parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka. A total of 41 SEP candidates will stand for elections in three electoral districts—21 in the capital of Colombo, 9 in Jaffna in the north, and 11 in Nuwara Eliya in the central plantation area.

This will enable voters in each of these districts to cast a vote directly for the SEP, while its election campaign will reach out to workers, rural masses and youth around the country.

Our election announcement posted on Saturday explained that we are campaigning “to build an independent political movement of the working class, based on international socialism, against war, austerity and the turn to authoritarian methods of rule.”

The following SEP candidates will spearhead this struggle:

Colombo

Vilani Peiris, 76, a long-standing SEP Political Committee (PC) member, heads the SEP candidate list in Colombo district. She became a member of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), forerunner of the SEP in Sri Lanka, in 1969, just after finishing school.

She has played a leading role in key areas of party work. Peiris led four important workers’ inquiry committees launched by the party: Into the conditions faced by workers in Free Trade Zone factories such as Korea Ceylon and Ansell Lanka; water pollution in Rathupaswala-Weliweriya and a deadly collapse of the rubbish dump at Meethotamulla in Colombo’s outer suburbs.

Sakuntha Hirimuthugoda, 26, is a Political Committee member and leading member of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). Sakuntha was attracted to the SEP’s socialist program as the solution to deepening social problems as a school student and became a party member at 18. He writes for the WSWs on social and youth issues, and on health, including the coronavirus pandemic. Having completed a Bachelor of Science degree, he is reading for a Master’s degree in environmental science.

Dinesh Heymaal, 33, a PC member and also a leading IYSSE member, was attracted to the SEP in 2016 on its firm political perspective of a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic as the solution for the Tamil national issue. He is a WSWs writer on Indian politics, the democratic rights of the workers and the reactionary perspective of Tamil nationalist politics.

W.A. Sunil, 72, joined the party as a textile worker from Thulhiriya textile factory in 1975 and became a PC member in 1977. He was actively involved in a strike struggle in his factory and faced police arrest in 1976. Due to the campaign waged by RCL, Sunil was released without charges after one month. He has been active among textile, railway and plantation workers.

He was arrested in 1989 by state security forces under the United National Party (UNP) government but was released after three days due to the powerful intervention of the RCL and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). He has been a regular WSWs writer.

Jaffna

Thirugnana Sampanthar, 54, an SEP Political Committee member, heads the SEP candidate list in Jaffna district. He joined the RCL in 1992, amid the Colombo government's reactionary communal war in the North and East. While displaced in a refugee camp in the Vaddukoddai area, he read *Tholilalar Pathai*, the RCL's Tamil language newspaper and was attracted to the internationalist perspective of Trotskyism on the national question.

Sampanthar has been an intransigent fighter for the unity of Tamil and Sinhala workers, against both the Sinhala supremacism of the Colombo political establishment and nationalist outlook of separatism of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He has headed the SEP candidates list in the northern region three times since 2013.

In 1998, Sampanthar was arrested by the LTTE along with three other comrades, including Rajendran Sutharshan, for pasting up SEP posters against the war and against the LTTE's separatist program. The LTTE was compelled to release the SEP comrades after 50 days, following a powerful international campaign waged by the ICFI through the WSWs.

Rajendran Sutharshan, 53, has been a member of the party since 1992. He joined the RCL when he was displaced from his home on the northern island of Kayts and lived in Kilinochchi during the civil war. Amid bitter infighting between rival Tamil nationalist organizations, he was attracted to the RCL's internationalist outlook and opposition to racism and communalism. Sutharshan is a fisherman and campaigns actively in the fishing communities in Kayts and Velanai.

Mahalingam Dilaxshan, 32, has been a PC member of the SEP since 2022. He joined the SEP in 2019, while working in a theatre in Jaffna and was convinced by its policies on the Tamil national question. He has studied an English course at the Advanced Technologies Institute in Jaffna. He is an IYSSE leader and regular campaigner among Jaffna university students. He writes on Tamil bourgeois politics and youth issues.

Nuwara Eliya

Myilvaganam Thevarajah, 71, is a PC member and leads the Nuwara Eliya district SEP list. Repelled by Tamil nationalist politics, he joined the RCL in 1979 while working as a technical officer in a local government department in Jaffna district. He has worked full-time for the party since 1983 and led the party work in the northern region during the communal war.

Thevarajah was instrumental in the RCL's campaign against the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord that brought so-called Indian peace-keeping troops into the North and East of the island. The RCL fought to unify Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers against the war and the LTTE's Tamil separatism as well as the reactionary Sinhala chauvinist campaign of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) against the Accord.

Thevarajah has campaigned in the plantation areas of central Sri Lanka since the early 1990s. He has led the struggle to establish independent workers' action committees in plantations, in opposition to the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC). He is well known for leading the SEP's campaign in defence of plantation workers against company-government joint witch-hunts, including of workers from the Alton estate in Maskeliya.

Iranganie Silva, 67, has been a member of the party since 1991. She has been involved in the numerous workers' struggles which have erupted including in the tea estates of Passara and Weeriyabadda, and textile factories in Bandarawela and Badulla. She was elected to the party's Central Committee in 1996 and again in 2022.



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