SEP/IYSSE online public lecture: Lessons of the 2022 mass uprising in Sri Lanka for workers and youth

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
15 July 2026

The Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) will hold an online public meeting on Sunday, July 26, at 7:00 p.m. to discuss the political lessons of the 2022 mass uprising for workers and students entering into struggles against the attacks carried out by the current Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government on their social and democratic rights.

The 2022 uprising emerged against brutal and sweeping austerity measures carried out by the government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse, which imposed on working people the full burden of the economic crisis intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

The mass movement in Sri Lanka was the most explosive expression of a global upsurge of the working class. It united millions of workers, youth and rural poor, cutting across Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communal divisions, whipped up by all sections of the ruling elite. Demonstrating the enormous social power of the working class, the uprising forced Rajapakse to flee the country on July 9 and resign as president. His government collapsed.

The decisive question, however, is why this mass movement failed to achieve the aspirations of the masses who took part in it. The outcome was not predetermined. Two opposing political perspectives confronted each other throughout the uprising.

Then main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and the JVP/NPP, with the assistance of various fake-left organisations, including the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), and trade union bureaucracies, worked to derail the mass movement and tie it to the bourgeois parliamentary framework by calling for an "interim government."

In direct opposition to all these forces, the SEP intervened to fight for an independent political movement of the working class, based on its revolutionary socialist program and perspective. It called for the establishment of independent action committees of workers and rural poor in every factory, workplace, neighbourhood and rural area.

On July 20, 2022, the SEP, taking an important strategic initiative, launched a campaign to build a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses, based on democratically elected delegates from those action committees. This Congress would spearhead the struggle for an independent political movement of the working class, rallying support from the rural poor, with the aim of establishing a government of workers and peasants, based on a socialist and internationalist program. This was the alternative to the political dead-end represented by the interim-government perspective.

The central lesson of 2022 is that the working class requires its own independent revolutionary leadership and program. The derailment of the mass movement into the framework of parliament paved the way for the ruling class to install as president the utterly discredited, pro-US imperialist figure Ranil Wickremesinghe, leader of the United National Party (UNP), following Rajapakse's resignation. He moved to suppress the uprising and began to implement the brutal austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

When the Wickremesinghe government was confronted with mass opposition from working people, the ruling class turned to the JVP/NPP, which came to power in presidential and general elections in late 2024 by exploiting popular anger towards Sri Lanka's traditional parties.

Today, the JVP/NPP government of president Anura Kumara Dissanayake is continuing the IMF austerity

© World Socialist Web Site

agenda agreed by Wickremesinghe, grinding down living standards for working people. It has used brutal police-state methods to intimidate and suppress struggles by workers, youth and rural poor. At the same time, the government is closely integrating Colombo into the US-led war drive against China.

Efforts are underway to rewrite the history of the 2022 uprising. Sections of the ruling elite, mainly Rajapakse's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and their associates, are branding the mass movement as a US-sponsored conspiracy to topple the Rajapakse government. Their aim is to conceal the profound social crisis that drove millions into struggle and to justify the strengthening of the repressive powers of the state.

The FSP, meanwhile, claims that the uprising was defeated solely through the combined actions of the ruling elite and imperialist powers. This narrative conceals its own political responsibility. By promoting illusions in an interim capitalist government and opposing the mobilisation of the working class on a socialist program, the FSP played a critical role in diverting and demobilising the movement.

The lessons of 2022 are not only relevant to Sri Lanka. Workers throughout the world confront worsening austerity, attacks on democratic rights, unprecedented social inequality and the escalation of US war against Iran, which is one front in a developing world war. The experiences of the Sri Lankan working class contain vital strategic lessons for workers internationally.

The purpose of this online public lecture is to draw the necessary political lessons and discuss the revolutionary perspective required for the struggles ahead. The SEP and IYSSE urge workers, youth, students, intellectuals, housewives and all those seeking an end to the barbarism produced by capitalism to attend this important event.

Date and time: Sunday, July 26, 7:00 p.m.

Register here to attend this event on Zoom.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site