

SEP to contest general elections in Sri Lanka

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
12 October 2024

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is contesting the general elections to be held in Sri Lanka on November 14. We are standing 41 candidates in three electoral districts—in the capital of Colombo, in Jaffna in the north, and in Nuwaraeliya in the central plantation area. SEP Political Committee members Vilani Peiris, P.T. Sampanthar and M. Thevarajah are, respectively, the leaders of our electoral slates in these districts.

The SEP is intervening in this parliamentary election 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.

In 2022, a mass uprising of workers, youth and rural poor against acute social deprivation forced Gotabaya Rajapakse from the presidency. But his successor, Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was elevated to power behind the backs of the people with the support of all the establishment parties and the trade unions, only intensified the assault on working people.

Working with global capital and at the behest of big business, his government imposed savage International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures, including massive spending cuts, punitive electricity tariff increases and further regressive taxes.

Now, millions of working people have voted Anura Kumara Disanayake, the leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and its electoral front, the National People's Power (NPP), into the presidency, and a JVP/NPP government has been formed.

In winning office, Disanayake and his JVP/NPP cynically exploited the deep-rooted popular hostility to the traditional governing capitalist parties and the tiny clique of corrupt ruling-class families (the Jayawardenes/Wickremesinghes, Rajapakses, Premdasas, etc.) that have always dominated them.

The SEP issues an emphatic warning to all workers and rural toilers: Don't allow yourselves to be duped twice! Disanayake will prove no different than Rajapakse and Wickremesinghe.

The JVP/NPP is a right-wing, pro-imperialist, Sinhala chauvinist party. The claims in the Sri Lankan media that Disanayake is a "leftist," even a "Marxist," are lies that are being promoted to confuse the working class and politically disarm it.

The JVP was an avid supporter of the anti-Tamil racist war, long ago renounced any mention of socialism, and has spent the past three decades integrating itself into the Colombo political establishment.

Disanayake and the JVP/NPP have repeatedly pledged to implement the IMF's austerity diktats. These include the privatisation/restructuring of over 400 state-owned enterprises, the destruction of hundreds of thousand public service jobs, further cuts to essential services, including free education and health care, and increased tax burdens on the masses.

Working people should take a warning from Disanayake's repeated pronouncements that "law and order" are vital to the JVP/NPP's economic "development" program. The JVP/NPP government will not hesitate to use the battery of existing anti-democratic laws to suppress the inevitable opposition to its austerity measures. Significantly, it has dropped almost all mention of its previous claims it would abolish the authoritarian executive presidency.

The JVP/NPP government has been feted by the ruling class, which is

depending on it to safeguard its interests. Revealingly, Wickremesinghe, who predicted an economic catastrophe if the JVP came to power, immediately declared his confidence in the new government. US President Biden and Indian Prime Minister Modi both affirmed their eagerness to closely collaborate with the new government.

Disanayake has called early elections to hoodwink the population into giving the JVP/NPP a parliamentary majority and strengthening its hand prior to moving forward with the next round of IMF austerity.

For the SEP, its election campaign is an essential element in our fight to politically and organisationally prepare the working class for the political struggle ahead against the new JVP/NPP government.

We say none of the burning issues confronting the working class and oppressed masses—poverty, unemployment, social inequality, the growing danger of world war and the assault on democratic rights—can be solved within the framework of capitalism and the nation state.

What is needed is the unification of the disparate struggles of working people in the fight for a workers' and peasants' government to transform society on socialist lines to meet the pressing social needs of the vast majority, not the profits of the super-wealthy few.

For a global working class-led movement against imperialist war

The Sri Lankan elections are being held amid an unprecedented social, economic and political crisis that has roiled bourgeois rule on the island. This crisis is itself rooted in a systemic breakdown of world capitalism that is driving the imperialist powers, led by the United States, to pursue a redivision of the world through aggression and world war.

The US and the other imperialist powers have politically and materially supported Israel's year-long genocidal war against the Palestinians in Gaza, and are now facilitating its invasion of Lebanon and preparations to attack Iran.

The US-NATO instigated war against Russia in Ukraine is a second front in this global war. Over the past two-and-a-half years, the imperialist powers have relentlessly escalated the war, making clear they are ready to risk nuclear war to achieve their predatory aims.

At the same time, US imperialism is dangerously escalating its provocations and war preparations against China, which it perceives as its most dangerous rival.

The US and its ally India are aggressively working to integrate the countries of South Asia, including Sri Lanka, into their war drive against China. The JVP leadership has already signalled its willingness to line up with Washington and New Delhi, a policy that was already far advanced under the Wickremesinghe government. Responding to Biden's congratulatory message, Disanayake declared that Sri Lanka under his leadership would work closely with the US and further Washington's interests in the Indo-Pacific.

The SEP insists that only the revolutionary intervention of the international working class can stop US imperialism and its allies

plunging humanity into a catastrophic third world war. Along with the other sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), we are campaigning for a unified anti-war movement of the international working class to put an end to the source of war—capitalism and its outmoded division of the world into rival nation-states. We call on workers and youth in Sri Lanka and across South Asia to join this fight against war.

A crisis of class rule

All the parties of the bourgeois political establishment, including the Premadasa-led Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP), the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) of former presidents Mahinda and Gotabhaya Rajapakse, and the Tamil bourgeois parties, are in disarray. The root cause of their crisis is the hemorrhaging of their popular support after decades of presiding over deepening poverty, social inequality and war.

None of them represents any type of alternative for working people. Should the JVP fail in its bid to win a parliamentary majority, none would represent the slightest impediment to Dissanayake implementing IMF austerity or harnessing Sri Lanka to American imperialism's war-chariot.

The SEP urges workers to reject fake-left parties like the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), which are working to politically tie the working class to the bourgeois parliamentary framework. The FSP is sowing illusions in the new JVP/NPP government, claiming it could be pressured to the left and covering up its reactionary character.

The lessons of the 2022 uprising and the fight for a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses

The SEP will fight to bring to the working class the seminal lessons of the 2022 mass uprising. Unfolding over the course of four months, the uprising demonstrated the immense social power of the working class, whose strikes broke the back of the Rajapakse regime. It also powerfully affirmed the objective class unity of the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim masses who jointly took to the streets to oppose intolerable living conditions.

At the same time, the fatal political weakness of the uprising was that the working class stood on the sidelines and left the political initiative to the ruling class, its parties and the trade unions. The unions, including those led by the JVP and the FSP, promoted the demand for an "interim" capitalist government based on a reshuffling of the parliamentary deck. The result was the anti-democratic installation of Wickremesinghe, who negotiated and imposed the IMF deal, which all parties staunchly supported.

In opposition to all these forces, the SEP rejected the "interim government" and sought to arm the 2022 uprising with a revolutionary socialist program, based on the independent mobilisation of the working class in opposition to the entire capitalist framework.

We fought to build action committees of workers and poor in every workplace and rural area, independent from the unions and bourgeois parties, to organise the struggle to secure basic necessities, oppose austerity, and develop a movement for workers' power.

In July 2022, the SEP initiated a campaign to build a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses, based on a growing

network of action committees. It would serve as the means for the working class and oppressed masses to unite their struggles, articulate their demands and systematically oppose their class power to all the parties and institutions of the bourgeoisie, including the parliament and executive presidency.

Two years on and under conditions where the working class will be coming into explosive struggles against a JVP/NPP government, the fight to build action committees and convene a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses is even more urgent.

For the unity of the working class! Reject all forms of nationalism and communalism!

The working class cannot afford to be divided. We call on workers to reject all forms of nationalism, including Sinhala chauvinism, Tamil separatism and every form of communalism. The SEP warns: Don't be fooled by the JVP/NPP's attempts to cover up its notorious record of anti-Tamil incitement. As the working class challenges its big business agenda, it will resort to whipping up Sinhala chauvinism to divide workers and channel mounting social anger in a reactionary direction.

Already, in the run-up to the presidential election, Dissanayake and his JVP reaffirmed their support for Buddhism's exalted status in the constitution and threatened the Tamils in the north and east that they would incur the wrath of the "south" if they opposed a JVP/NPP government. As for the Tamil capitalist parties, they back IMF austerity and are strident supporters of Sri Lanka serving as Washington's satrap. The only concern of the Tamil elites is to obtain a "power sharing" arrangement to boost their privileges and profits at the expense of the working class.

In opposition to all factions of the ruling class and its poisonous communal politics, the SEP fights to forge the fighting unity of all working people—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—to establish a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka-Eelam as part of a broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

A program of action:

We call on workers to fight for the following demands:

- Reject the IMF austerity program in its entirety! The foreign debts incurred by the bourgeoisie should be repudiated and their ill-gotten wealth expropriated to meet the urgent social needs of the masses.
- No to all privatisations and capitalist restructuring! Place all public sector enterprises facing the threat of privatisation under the democratic control of the workers!
- Increased subsidies and social programs for rural farmers and the needy!
- Transform the banks, big companies and plantations into public companies under the democratic control of the working class!
- Dismantle the massive military-security apparatus! Withdraw all troops from the north and east, where they continue to repress the Tamil minority.
- Repeal all repressive laws, including the Essential Public Services Act, Anti-Terror Bill and Online Security Bill!
- Abolish the authoritarian executive presidency!

The SEP bases its strategy on the Trotskyist program of Permanent Revolution. Workers in Sri Lanka must join forces with workers in South

Asia and around the world who—faced with the same capitalist drive for austerity and intensified worker-exploitation and the same threat of war and dictatorship—are coming into mass and revolutionary struggles.

The most crucial lesson of the 2022 uprising is the need to build a revolutionary leadership to infuse the struggles of the working class with a socialist-internationalist program, forge its political independence, and spearhead its struggle to rally the oppressed masses against Sri Lankan and international capitalism.

We urge all workers and youth to join the fight to build the SEP as the mass revolutionary party of the working class, read the *World Socialist Web Site* and vote for our candidates in the Colombo, Jaffna and Nuwaraeliya districts on November 14.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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