

# Vote for SEP candidates in the Sri Lankan national elections! Fight for a workers' and peasants' government and socialist internationalism!

By the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)  
3 August 2020

The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers, young people and the poor to vote for our candidates in Sri Lanka's national elections on Wednesday. The party is fielding a total of 43 candidates in the Colombo, Jaffna and Nuwara-Eliya districts.

The SEP is the only party fighting for a unified movement of the working class, across ethnic lines, on a socialist and internationalist program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising danger of dictatorship and imperialist war.

The coronavirus, which has so far infected 18 million people and killed 690,000 internationally, has accelerated the crisis of world capitalism and produced an economic recession not seen since the World War II. Facing the emergence of mass resistance and revolutionary struggles, the ruling classes in every country are preparing military and fascist dictatorships to suppress this opposition.

US imperialism is at the centre of this crisis. The Trump administration is taking police state measures aimed at crushing protests and stepped up its military and political provocations against China, Russia and Iran. This is increasing the danger of a Third World War with catastrophic consequences for mankind.

The global crisis has intensified the economic, political and social turmoil in Sri Lanka. Workers' resistance has erupted against the job and wage cuts and unsafe working conditions imposed by big business with the backing of the Rajapakse government.

About 400,000 jobs have been destroyed in the formal manufacturing sector while the government imposes its austerity and privatisation policies and the cost of essentials increases.

Last week's strike by 10,000 Colombo Port workers in protest against the privatisation of the eastern terminal is just one indication of the rising working-class resistance. While the pro-capitalist unions shut down the strike yesterday, deep-going opposition that has accumulated over decades,

including from the 30-year communalist war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, is rising throughout the island.

The pandemic has exposed the ruthless class attitude of the Rajapakse government and the official opposition parties towards all working people. The government has rejected mass testing and claims lower infection rates in order to present a rosy picture of the real situation.

Like its counterparts internationally, the Sri Lankan government has made private profit the priority, not the health and lives of working people. Responding to big business demands, President Rajapakse has directed public and private sector employees to go back to work under unsafe conditions, on lower wages and increased productivity targets. Sri Lankan authorities have also blocked the return of 40,000 Sri Lankan migrant workers from the Middle East, claiming they could bring the coronavirus.

Determined to suppress the growing movement of workers, President Rajapakse and his ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) have intensified their efforts to secure a two-thirds parliamentary majority in order to rewrite the constitution and give the president autocratic powers. His call for a "strong government" is a euphemism for a presidential dictatorship based on the military.

Under bogus claims of fighting COVID-19, Rajapakse has elevated a host of generals into key positions, including the appointment of retired Major General Kamal Gunaratne as defence secretary.

The opposition United National Party (UNP), Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB), Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and Muslim parties have no fundamental differences with the ruling regime. They participated in two all-party meetings called by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, the president's brother, and backing all the administration's responses to the pandemic. On April 27, the UNP, SJB, TNA, Muslim parties and plantation unions

promised “unconditional support” to the president if he reconvened parliament.

Fearful of the eruption of revolutionary working-class struggles, the “opposition” political parties are backing Rajapakse’s moves towards dictatorship. None has opposed the militarisation of the administration.

SJB leader Sajith Premadasa has declared that he “can work” with President Rajapakse if the SLPP forms government after the elections. The TNA has declared that it wants to win more parliamentary seats in order to continue negotiations with the Rajapakse government. In other words, the TNA, in exchange for a few seats from Rajapakse, will back his dictatorship.

UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has declared that if his party wins he will negotiate another International Monetary Fund loan to solve the crisis. In other words, he is willing to impose more austerity as his previous government did.

At the same time, the SLPP and its chauvinist allies have stepped up their anti-Muslim and anti-Tamil rhetoric in an attempt to divide the working class and channel the social tensions along ethnic lines. The Tamil and Muslim parties have responded with their own communal and nationalist propaganda.

The pseudo-left groups, such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) and the United Socialist Party (USP) are directly or indirectly embracing Rajapakse’s reactionary agenda.

The NSSP is contesting the elections on a joint ticket with the pro-imperialist UNP, while the FSP is promoting a fake “left” front of trade unions and other left groups to block any independent movement by the working class. The FSP has written twice to the prime minister during the pandemic offering to assist the government to “face the crisis.”

The SEP in the past six months, in line with its co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), has deepened its struggle against the government and big business attacks on the working class and the poor.

From the outset, the SEP issued a statement on March 28 entitled “Coronavirus crisis in Sri Lanka: A program for the working class” that called for the unity of Sri Lankan workers as part of the global efforts of the working class to fight the pandemic.

On April 18, our statement “Sri Lanka: Oppose return to work in unsafe pandemic conditions! No to job destruction!” rejected Rajapakse’s demand for a return to work.

On June 2, the party issued another statement entitled: “SEP (Sri Lanka) calls for action committees to counter threat of pandemic and defend jobs.”

On June 9, the SEP issued this statement, “Sri Lankan president establishes military taskforce: Another step toward dictatorship,” warning the working class about Rajapakse’s anti-democratic measures.

The Rajapakse government has responded by targeting our party. This was sharply expressed in the visits by army

intelligence officers in the military-occupied North to homes of our party candidates, including the leader of the SEP’s Jaffna district slate.

“An effective fight against the pandemic,” as the ICFI has explained in a June 23 statement, “requires the systematic coordination of economic, scientific, industrial and information resources. This essential international collaboration is impossible under capitalism, which is rooted in the nation-state system. The ruling class of every country is preoccupied, above all, with its own national interests...”

“Control over the response to the pandemic must be taken out of the hands of the capitalist class. Mass action by the working class, coordinated on an international scale, is necessary to bring the pandemic under control and save millions of lives that are now at risk. The fight against the pandemic is not only, or even primarily, a medical issue. It is, above all, a matter of social and political struggle.”

This is the basis of the fight being waged by the SEP in Sri Lanka. We call upon workers to establish independent action committees and safety committees to fight for a safe workplace, defend jobs, working conditions and wages and defeat the attack on democratic rights.

The working class must seize the banks, the large corporations and the plantations and reorganise the economy rationally, not for profit but for the benefit of the majority. This is the only answer to the dictatorship being prepared by Rajapakse and his SLPP.

This program is inseparably connected to the fight against imperialist war. In 2015, Washington orchestrated a regime-change operation in Sri Lanka to oust Mahinda Rajapakse, who was leaning towards Beijing, and install Mithripala Sirisena as president who integrated Sri Lanka more closely into the US war drive. The Trump administration has repeatedly warned President Gotabhaya Rajapakse that he must maintain close military relations with the US.

The Sri Lankan working class must unite with its international class brothers and sisters to build an anti-war movement on the basis of socialist policies. Against the nationalist filth of reactionary bourgeois parties and their pseudo-left hangers on, the SEP and its sister parties in the ICFI fight for this revolutionary internationalist program.

We urge workers and youth to join the SEP to build it as a mass party of the working class and take forward the fight for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic, as part of a Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally.

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