

Sri Lanka after the elections

Socialist Party of Sri Lanka Mon, 24/10/2011 - 11:55

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The local elections on 8th of October ended with victory of the ruling nationalist alliance 'United People's Freedom Alliance' around the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) of president Rajapakse. The Alliance won 22 of the 23 contested urban councils. The United National Party (UNP) the main bourgeois opposition party, was only able to win in Colombo district.

The results reflect the continued deep, reactionary consequences of the government's victory against the Tamil people. In the short term, that immediately strengthened the rule of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, the SLFP and the Alliance over the Tamil people, thousands of whom were massacred in the war. After the defeat of the LTTE, hundreds of thousands are still dispersed and living in extreme poverty and the Northern and Eastern Provinces are de facto still under military rule.

In the longer term, the effects of the nationalist chauvinist victory of the Rajapakse have been reinforced by a number of factors. Firstly, there has been a massive campaign of intimidation and misinformation spread by the media and the government. For example, reports by the UN and foreign media like Channel 4 about atrocious human rights violations and mass atrocities have been demagogically presented as 'imperialist interference'.

Nor has the government left its campaign at the level of demagogic lies. In recent years, journalists who reported about the Tamil oppression were attacked by thugs, 'disappeared' or were jailed.

The growth of foreign investment from the EU, the US, China and India has stimulated GDP growth. The government had some success in presenting this as 'economic advance' despite the fact that it has only benefited a few from the super-rich and the small middle class. In reality, the workers and the poor in the towns and on the plantations have been hit extremely hard by a rise of inflation, of food prices in particular.

Thuggery and electoral fraud are an additional, constant element of 'normal' Lankan bourgeois politics. This was again highlighted on the election day, when an MP of the Alliance killed a senior trade union organiser and instructor of the president.

However, probably the most important reason for the government strength is the fact that the main parliamentary opposition parties - the UNP and the chauvinist, 'Maoist' JVP - backed the reactionary war. The JVP even criticised the government from the right, at the beginning of the reactionary offensive against the Tamils. Later, it backed general Fonseca, commander of the army during the war (!) in the presidential elections against Rajapakse.

Such an 'opposition' necessarily plays into the hands of the government, it has discredited the opposition and thrown it into crisis. The UNP is divided and weakened.

Now, the JVP also faces a crisis as a result of its chauvinism and betrayal of the workers and poor. An opposition has even arisen amongst the youth and the students of the organisation who criticise the JVP's support of the war and argue that the JVP should have supported Tamil rights and mass struggle.

This is a very significant change of position, even if it still falls short of clearly supporting the right to self-determination of the Tamil people.

However, the last months have also seen some important struggles such as the struggles of workers in the Free Trade zones for elementary trade union rights, the attempts to build a trade union united front against the crisis and, albeit small, pickets from the Left, human rights and Tamil organisations against the government's chauvinist campaigns.

In the elections, the SPSL stood one candidate in Hambantota district. In its statement 'Let's use the elections to build an independent left!' it tried to address and give an answer to the key political questions of the Sri Lankan left and workers' movement. The record of the trade union leaders, not to speak of the fake-left chauvinist JVP, demonstrate that the working class and the left in the country can only move forward, if it organises independently of all bourgeois parties and fights for an action programme which addresses the burning needs of the workers, the peasants and the nationally oppressed Tamil people:

'We need a different, socialist solution to the burning problems of the workers and peasants, the youth and elderly, for Sinhalese and Tamil people. This is why we propose a socialist socio-economic programme. We are standing in this election with the following slogans:

- Force the government to cut the price of electricity, water and transport.
- Provide more facilities for the free trade zone workers, including trade union rights.
- Instead of so-called 'social insurance' we demand a proper pension scheme.
- We call for the building of working class councils drawing in the mass organisations around the factories and work places
- We call for committees of farmers to prepare agricultural development plans and we demand a proper water system for agriculture and subsidies for fertilisers to develop agriculture.
- Repeal the Emergency Powers Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, for the restoration of full democratic rights to all media.
- Withdraw all military forces from the Tamil lands, full freedom of movement for all refugees currently held in camps, resettlement of all Tamil communities under the administration of elected workers' and farmers' councils.
- Resolve the national question by recognising the right of self-determination of the Tamil people.
- For an emergency programme of reconstruction in the war zones under the democratic control of the communities involved. For the restoration of full trade union rights in the former war zones.
- Full equal status for the Tamil and Sinhala languages, full citizenship rights for plantation workers. For a programme of construction of housing, schools and infrastructure in the plantation settlements, under the control of the communities themselves.
- For price controls on everyday necessities, for a sliding scale of

wages to protect income against inflation as calculated by the workers' own organisations.

- Recognition of full citizenship and civil rights for all communities and equal access to all public amenities, irrespective of language, ethnicity or creed.

- Tax the rich and the big corporations to fund the extension of health, education, housing and transport services under workers' control.

- Nationalise the assets of the multinational corporations and impose controls on the transfer of funds out of the country.

- Coordinate the struggles of the workers and the oppressed through the building of workers' and farmers' councils. For a workers' and farmers' government responsible to a national congress of workers' and farmers' councils.

- We call on all the socialist organisations and the trade unions and all those who oppose chauvinism and communalism to join with us during the parliamentary elections, and in the struggles that will follow, to build a new, mass workers' party committed to the overthrow of capitalism in Sri Lanka as part of a new, Fifth International, a World Party of Socialist Revolution.?

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