

Sri Lanka: Vote Socialist - and organise to fight!

Socialist Party of Sri Lanka Tue, 05/11/2019 - 11:14

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Sri Lanka is facing a steadily worsening economic situation. For years, governments have spent more than they raised. To cover this up, they have borrowed from the international banks and institutions such as the IMF. As a result, the country has a foreign debt of some US\$54 billion and the interest payments on that alone are more than taxation brings in.

In March, the IMF agreed to extend its US\$1.5bn loan until the middle of next year, but, of course, there are strings attached. In return for the loan, the IMF demands that the government cuts its debts by reducing spending and increasing revenue. In plain language that means less money spent on schools, hospitals, transport and welfare, more selling off public goods and more privatisation.

The mainstream candidates, Gotabaya Rajapakse and Sajith Premadasa know all this perfectly well, they have both been cabinet ministers, but they both promise to revitalise the economy, improve services and raise living standards. While their empty promises may vary, in reality they both have the same policy: use the rest of the IMF loan to buy support for their parties ahead of next year's parliamentary elections before the money runs out.

Whichever wins, they will then try to force the workers and farmers of Sri Lanka to pay the cost. The Socialist Party of Sri Lanka's candidate, Ajantha Perera, is not afraid to tell the truth: in the coming year, workers will have to fight just to keep what they already have, let alone improve their conditions or their pay.

But how to fight? That is the real question facing workers throughout the country - what should be our priorities, how should we organise, what is our goal? These are the questions Ajantha Perera answers with her election programme!

Democratic and Transitional Demands:

The Socialist Party of Sri Lanka is committed to the achievement of full and equal democratic rights for all those who live and work in Sri Lanka, irrespective of ethnicity, place of birth, gender or religion.

We demand the immediate repeal of all the Emergency Laws and repressive measures introduced during the thirty years of the civil war, an end to all censorship and the release of all those imprisoned under such laws.

we must link at all times our forces to those waging the same struggle in India and neighbouring countries, indeed, right around the world. In other words, what is necessary is what Marx and Trotsky called the Permanent Revolution.

We seek to combine the struggle for democratic rights with the struggle against capitalism

We believe it is necessary to use the revolutionary methods of working class political struggle; mass mobilisations, mass and general strikes, even to achieve immediate and democratic demands. At the high

point of struggle, it is necessary to create working-class political institutions such as workers' councils and factory committees.

Self-determination for the Tamils

The most urgent task facing Sri Lankan society is to recognise the right of national self-determination of the Tamil people, and to support their decades-long struggle for national liberation. That struggle has been fuelled by the systematic denial of equal rights, discrimination against their language and culture and brutal pogroms. In the aftermath of the war, the re-conquest of their territory will not end their aspirations for freedom, rather it will create a bitter and smouldering resentment whose flames will burst forth again at the earliest opportunity. Until the national oppression of the Tamil community is ended, there can be neither peace nor progress in Sri Lanka.

We demand the withdrawal of the military occupation forces and a transfer of public administration to democratically elected people's councils. We call for a democratically elected Tamil Assembly to decide on the form of government they want for themselves.

Whether that is complete separation or for autonomy within a federal Sri Lanka, the working class must support and aid them to achieve this by mass action. However, a capitalist state in such a small and impoverished area would be extremely unlikely to be able to meet the needs of its population. That is why we fight for the Tamil working class to come to the head of the liberation movement and establish a workers' state, aiming immediately at a federation with their class brothers and sisters in the rest of the island and across South Asia, too.

Our goal is the integration of the workers and poor peasants of all the national ethnic and religious communities of Sri Lanka into a common struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of working class power. Only the establishment of the common ownership of the land, the factories, the transport infrastructure, in short, of all the means of production, and implementation of the right of all to work, can ensure the provision of the social needs of all and overcome conflict for jobs or scarce resources between the national communities.

Build the workers' movement!

It is urgently necessary for the working-class to rebuild its organisations. There are over 2,000 trade unions in the country but they only organise less than 10% of all the workers. That means the great majority are tiny and ineffective. We need a national campaign to amalgamate the unions into fighting organisations that can effectively campaign for workers' interests. Existing trade unions must be won to a campaign of mass recruitment around a programme of militant direct action to defend wages, jobs and conditions. Socialists and militants must take the lead in winning the trade unions, or committing new unions, to a policy of opposition to communalism, organised democratically under the control of their members and with all leaders and officials elected and recallable and paid no more than the workers they represent.

We are for the building of industrial unions that organise all workers in an industry, irrespective of their particular trades, gender or ethnicity, and we support the merger of existing unions where necessary to achieve this. To coordinate the actions and formulate the interests of all organised workers, we are for a confederation of all class struggle unions. Within the enterprises and workplaces, we campaign for the formation of workplace committees with the right to negotiate over local pay, conditions and employment levels. We demand the repeal of all laws that restrict the rights of workers to organise themselves in unions.

Outside of the workplace, we call for working-class organisations in every area of life: sport, education, culture but, above all, we are for the formation of working-class women's and youth organisations. Vital as

all these forms of organisation are, they are incapable of organising all of the working-class, let alone leading it to the revolutionary transformation of society. For that, a political party of the working class is necessary. Within all working-class organisations, we raise the need for a new workers' party to be created by, and based upon, the mass organisations of the working-class. Against those who argue for a 'broad party' whose programme is limited to the reform of capitalism, we will argue for the party to be founded on this revolutionary programme of action, with a democratic centralist constitution that allows full debate within the party and disciplined, united implementation of party policy in the class struggle.

For a workers' answer to the crisis of globalisation!

Our goal is the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist society in which production is planned on the basis of social need, not private profit, and is controlled by the workers themselves through the democratically centralised structures of a workers' state. The unifying theme of our programme is the struggle to extend workers' control both within the workplace and in the broader society. This will demand the creation of new workers' organisations such as factory committees, defence organisations, local action committees and, at the point of heightened class struggle, workers' councils.

Defend and improve the workers' living standards!

All demands for improvements in pay, labour intensity and length of the working day should be formulated with the involvement of the workers themselves and all decisions over, for example, the conduct of negotiations, disputes and acceptance of settlements must be subject to the agreement of democratic meetings of all workers involved. We oppose all secret negotiations and demand the maximum possible transparency, for example, via recording or broadcasting of negotiations. To compensate for the effects of inflation since the onset of the world recession in 2008, we call for an immediate increase of R8,500 on all wages.

Where the bosses try to devalue wages through inflationary policies, so that workers face the danger of constant mobilisation simply to maintain living standards, we demand a sliding scale of wages based on a working-class cost of living index drawn up by "price-watch" committees which include the working-class women who deal most directly with household budgeting.

Workers on the plantations, although not subject to the same legal restrictions as those in the SEZ's, are, if anything, in an even worse predicament. Geographically separated from the main centres of population, their lives are little different now from decades ago; whole families live in single rooms in the 'long huts' built by the British 150 years ago, provision of power and clean water is scanty and sanitation is primitive. The daily income of a worker is as little as R350 and even this is dependent on working 21 days in the month ? and supervisors can cut their costs simply by not choosing a worker on that many days. As the first steps towards the eradication of these inhuman conditions, we demand a statutory living wage for all plantation workers and a national programme to provide modern housing and services on all plantations.

Exploitation of the island's resources by multinational corporations based in the imperialist states is a significant factor in both the disproportionate development of its economic structure and the poverty of its population. Moreover, interest payments on foreign debt constitute a permanent drain on the island's economy. We demand the nationalisation of all foreign-owned enterprises and an immediate cessation of payments on foreign debts.

Liberate women

All class societies have forced women into a subordinate and inferior role. This social oppression is rooted in the family structure which is used to ensure that men control the fertility and reproduction of women. Capitalism has maintained this social oppression of women but also adapted it. Now, women's traditional role in domestic labour is used to ensure the provision of a male workforce that can be exploited by

capitalist employers but at no cost to them. Where women are themselves employed this can have the positive effect of overcoming the isolation of the home and participation in collective social organisation but it also means that capitalist exploitation is added to the burden of their domestic duties.

The key to overcoming the social oppression of working-class women is the self-organisation of those women themselves. In all areas of life, we call on women to organise themselves to fight against discrimination and for their full equality. This has to include all aspects of civil rights such as citizenship, the right to vote, equal pay, equal access to education and training, protective legislation regarding maternity rights, control of fertility and reproduction through free contraception and abortion on demand. However, because oppression is rooted in the family and domestic labour, we also demand measures to alleviate this burden through social provision of childcare, canteen and laundry facilities.

An end to the Oppression of Youth

We demand a programme of construction of schools and colleges to ensure all children have free access to a modern secular education and to sports and leisure facilities. These should be under the democratic control of those who work and learn within them together with representatives of parents and the local working class movement. We oppose all restrictions on the rights of young people to develop their own cultural, sexual and political lives and demand free access to contraception and abortion.

We oppose all discrimination against young people in employment, demanding equal wages as well as continued training and education. We fight for the recruitment of all young workers into the appropriate trades unions and call for the right to caucus within all labour movement organisations. To counter high unemployment among graduates, we demand specialised graduate employment schemes and training courses.

Against fomenting religious prejudice and chauvinism

We oppose Sinhalese nationalism and politically oppose the fake Marxism of the JVP. They try to confuse workers and youth by claiming to be Marxist but they called on people to support the capitalist government's war against the Tamils. We fight within the trade union movement to win workers' organisations to a progressive political position on the national question and against the JVP and bourgeois trade unions that politically mislead the working class. Violence from the state and the organised chauvinists plagues our movement. We must organise to defend ourselves. We call on the workers' movement to politically campaign for and begin to organise a workers' defence guard to protect our strikes and meetings and defend our demonstrations.

Agriculture and the protection of the environment

Above all the land must be nationalised and genuinely developed in a way that restores, rather than depletes, our natural reserves, with reforestation programmes, the development of a sustainable agriculture aimed at meeting the food needs of the people, not the export priorities of the multinationals or for use as biofuels when people are still hungry. We demand the maintenance of existing subsidies to small farmers, now threatened by IMF conditions, and the provision of the necessary support, such as cheap fertiliser, to prevent any further erosion of their living conditions.

We call on the trade unions and neighbourhood organisations to launch a campaign to combat degradation of both the urban and rural environment. Workers must block environmentally harmful projects and demand the implementation of a programme of measures, under workers' control, paid for by increased taxes on the rich and the big corporations, including the multinationals.

State and Revolution

Sixty years after Independence it is clear that parliamentary democracy in Sri Lanka has served, as it does

in all countries, only to mask the reality of how power is exercised. The right to vote every four years, which is itself denied to many Tamils, can never ensure that the island is governed in the interests of the majority. Throughout those decades, political power has alternated between the small traditional urban elites, represented on the whole by the UNP and its allies, and the numerically larger but economically weaker and rurally based Sinhalese bourgeoisie, represented by the SLFP. Both bourgeois forces have at times exploited communal tensions and even resorted to civil war to defend their interests while, at the same time, maintaining the facade of democracy to legitimise their actions.

There can be no doubt that the existing state will act to remove any such organs of working class and peasant power and it will, therefore, be necessary to develop their ability to defend themselves - at first through organised pickets and demonstration stewards and later by permanently organised defence groups and a workers' militia. As the class struggle develops, such councils and militia need to be established throughout the country and to be coordinated both regionally and nationally.

In the context of economic crisis and heightened class struggle, it is inevitable that at some point the conflict will reach a point at which the fundamental issue is posed: which class is to rule? Revolutionaries will answer that the workers and peasants must rule, they will demand a government based precisely on the organisations of struggle, the workers' councils and the militia, and they will call on those organisations to break up and dismantle the institutions of the old state: the police, the army, the civil service, the courts and the prisons so that they can never again impose the rule of the capitalists. We, the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka, support:

For a workers' and peasants' government

For a democratically planned economy

For a Federation of Workers' States of South Asia

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