

Sri Lankan SEP Jaffna meeting discusses political bankruptcy of Tamil parties

By our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a successful public meeting in Jaffna, the capital of Sri Lanka's Northern Province, late last month.

Attended by about 35 people, including workers, youths and housewives, the August 26 event discussed the key political issues confronting Sri Lankan workers. It was held against the background of strikes, mounting opposition to the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government and the slavish support of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) for the pro-US Colombo administration.

Before the meeting, SEP and IYSSE members and supporters campaigned among Jaffna University students and workers, and postal and health employees.

A postal worker told SEP campaigners: "We've been involved in several struggles against the government's privatisation plans and other issues but our demands have been ignored. Other workers have also come into struggle, including the petroleum workers but when the armed forces were used against them, TNA leader [Rajavarothiam] Sampanthan supported the government's attack.

"The trade unions do not want to coordinate these struggles against the government. I agree with you. Tamil and Sinhala workers must unite against this capitalist government."

A male nurse from Jaffna Hospital echoed these sentiments, saying: "This government is using court orders to ban workers' struggles even as it is destroying the public health service. We have to work long hours with the burden on us increasing day to day. While doctors, nurses and other health employees are fighting separately, they must unite. Yes [the problem is] that the unions are dividing the workers."

The public meeting was chaired by P.T. Sambandan, who said the TNA and other Tamil bourgeois parties were politically discredited among Tamils. Over the decades,

many workers, youth and the poor had come to realise that these organisations do not in any way represent their democratic and social aspirations, he said.

"The culmination of their betrayal is seen in their support for the campaign that brought the current pro-American government in Colombo to power. They have followed this by backing every government attack on the democratic rights and social conditions of workers and the poor, in the North and the South. The TNA is now directly supporting the geopolitical interests of American imperialism."

The first speaker, SEP political member M. Thevarajah, noted the recent struggles by Tamil workers in the North and other sections of the Sri Lankan working class. He reviewed the treacherous role of the bourgeois Tamil organisations. "These parties are with the government," he said.

The strikes and protests by postal and petroleum workers, as well as doctors and nurses in the public health sector, cut across ethnic lines, Thevarajah said, and this was part of an international struggle. "This is an indication of the maturing objective conditions for the socialist unity of all workers," he said.

Whereas the TNA insisted that "the people must maintain false hopes that the government would solve their problems," the reality was "the people are facing increased state repression with the covert and overt support of the Tamil parties." More than 100 people in Jaffna and nearby the villages had been arrested in recent weeks and military-police operations were underway in a new wave of repression.

Thevarajah reviewed some of the bitter experiences of the three-decade civil war and the SEP's principled political stand. "The SEP and its pioneer, the Revolutionary Communist League, opposed successive Colombo governments and fought for the socialist unity of Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers against Sinhala

communalism and the separatism of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).”

The final speaker, SEP political committee member W.A. Sunil, said the Tamil bourgeois parties faced a political crisis as a result of the radicalisation of working people and the bankruptcy of the nationalism.

“All the Tamil bourgeois parties face growing popular discontent because they are working with the Colombo government and the imperialist powers. They support the suppression of social and democratic rights of the workers and the poor, Tamil and Sinhala alike, and the preparations for imperialist war.”

Sunil said the Tamil people in the North and East had suffered gravely in the war but eight years after the conflict ended the catastrophic social problems have only deepened.

Land forcibly seized from residents by the military has not been returned and those displaced by the war have not been resettled, Sunil said. No action has been taken about the thousands of people who were “disappeared,” information about war crimes is suppressed, many political prisoners remain in prison and the military occupation continues.

Sunil warned that although Northern Province Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran and a TNA leader Suresh Premachandran had “criticised” other TNA leaders, this posturing was fraudulent. They had no fundamental opposition to working with the Colombo government or backing the imperialist powers.

“Anger is growing over the failure of the government and the Tamil parties to address their demands,” the speaker continued. “This is why there are attempts to divert this anger into political traps, such as the Tamil Peoples Forum, which is led by Wigneswaran.”

Sunil reviewed the political record of the Federal Party, Tamil United Liberation Party, the LTTE and the TNA, saying they were concerned about securing their own privileges as part of the exploitation of Tamil workers and the poor.

The defeat of the LTTE, Sunil continued, was not just a military question but the result of its separatist and nationalist politics. “There was no progressive economic and political content to the LTTE’s policies, which falsely claimed to be able to end anti-Tamil discrimination by establishing a separate state. This was a perspective for defending the privileges of the Tamil bourgeoisie with the help of imperialist powers.”

Sunil explained the degeneration of all nationalist movements, such as the African National Congress in

South Africa and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, amid the globalisation of the economy under capitalism. They moved to the right, and struck deals with one or another imperialist power. The oppression and the suffering of the people continued.

“The Sinhala bourgeoisie attempts to maintain ‘national unity’ by military force and it is chiefly responsible for the war and the ongoing oppression. While anti-Tamil communalism was, and is, a vicious weapon to divide the working class, Tamil nationalism helps to maintain this division.”

Sunil said pseudo-left organisations such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party and United Socialist Party cover up the reactionary political role played by the Tamil nationalist parties and promote national self-determination in an attempt to keep the Tamil population tied to the bourgeois Tamil parties.

The speaker explained that the fight against discrimination, oppression, government attacks on social rights and the preparations for imperialist war can be waged only by uniting workers across ethnic lines and struggling for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic as part of the fight for socialism in South Asia and internationally. He urged all those at the meeting to study the internationalist program and political record of the SEP and join the party.

Commenting on the event, one participant said: “The meeting explained that the working class needs to know about socialism. The Tamil bourgeois parties are whipping up Tamil communalism to prop up their support base.

“All over the world, bourgeois rulers are imposing their interests. In opposing them we have to take the initiative and build a leadership. That means that the SEP needs to expand its work among working people.”

A worker from Nallur, south of Jaffna, said: “The Tamil parties and leaders are talking about new leadership but they are discredited among the people. When you explain the anti-people workings of the Tamil capitalist parties, you’re telling people the truth.”

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