

Sri Lankan local elections: SEP holds public meetings in island's north

By our correspondent
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka recently held two public meetings in war-ravaged northern Jaffna and Kayts. The meetings were part of the Trotskyist movement's intervention into tomorrow's local council elections.

The SEP is fielding a list of 16 candidates in Kayts, 21 candidates in Kolonnawa, a Colombo working-class suburb, and 24 in Ambagamuwa in the central plantations district.

Before the meetings SEP and IYSSE members and supporters campaigned among workers and youth at Jaffna university and in Thirunelvely and Jaffna and various fishing villages, such as Gurunagar and Kayts. Thousands of copies of the SEP's election statement were distributed.

Residents in these areas are still suffering from the devastation created by the 26-year civil war conducted by successive Sri Lankan governments against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which ended with the separatist movement's defeat in May 2009.

Chairing the Jaffna meeting, SEP candidate P. Thirugnana Sampanthar explained that the party was standing in the elections to provide a socialist and international alternative to the capitalist parties.

"This election is occurring at critical time in the international political situation," he said. "On the one hand, the imperialist powers, led by US, are dragging humanity toward a catastrophic third world war. On the other hand, we are now seeing a resurgence of international working class struggles."

All the other parties and the media were covering up the danger of war and other key issues, Sampanthar said. The SEP was the only organisation discussing these issues with working people.

"The so-called good governance of President Maithripala Sirisena is not a government of people," Sampanthar said. He detailed its brutal social attacks on social and democratic rights and explained that the Tamil bourgeois nationalist parties, including the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and Tamil United Liberation Front, supported Sirisena's pro-US

administration.

The Sirisena government and the so-called opposition parties, Sampanthar said, were whipping up Tamil nationalism to divide the Tamil-speaking workers from their Sinhala brethren along ethnic lines. He emphasised the necessity for internationalist unity of workers.

SEP central committee member Rasaratnam Balagowry drew the audience's attention to the escalating censorship of the Internet.

"Google, Twitter and Facebook are run by giant corporates," he said. "They are censoring progressive and socialist web sites and social media, and the *World Socialist Web Site* in particular. This is a major threat to democratic rights. They want to decide what people think, talk about and share. These corporates and governments are nervous that socialist ideas will find an audience among workers and youth now coming into struggle."

Longstanding SEP member T. Chandrasekaran noted that 2018 marked 50 years since the founding of the Revolutionary Communist League, the forerunner of the SEP. "The SEP's journey is based on the struggle for socialism. Our movement has consistently intervened in every development in our history in Sri Lanka, in the region and internationally on the basis of a Marxist perspective."

The final speaker, SEP general secretary Wije Dias, explained the sharp international economic and political changes now underway, then outlined the situation in Sri Lanka.

"In the past, Sri Lankan capitalist ruling elite could maintain its repressive rule against the working people with the support of treacherous left parties, such as the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Stalinist Communist Party. Because these so-called left parties are now thoroughly discredited among the masses because of their betrayals, the United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)—the two main bourgeois parties—desperately came together in 2015 to form a government."

From the outset, Dias noted, this government had been confronted with ongoing protests against its anti-democratic

measures and austerity program by different sections of workers, rural poor and youth. It was fast approaching a situation where the ruling class was finding that parliamentary rule was inadequate for its purposes.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had equipped the state machinery with more vicious laws that further empower the police, military and judicial system, Dias said. President Sirisena had launched provocative measures to “eradicate corruption,” a campaign coated with Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism.

“In some instances the different factions of the government come into conflict with each other but all are moving toward a drastic re-fashioning of the repressive state to be used against the working people,” the speaker said.

Dias explained that the political and economic turmoil in Sri Lanka was an expression of a global crisis of capitalism. US imperialism’s attempts to re-establish its world hegemony through military might, he said, was leading to a breakdown of the international political and military structures established after World War II.

“Institutions like NATO face irreparable cracks as countries, such as the US, Germany and Turkey, each pull in different directions. This is clearly seen in the military conflict in Syria. The European Union has also begun to fracture, as shown with Brexit. Likewise, in the under-developed world the non-aligned movement cannot be convened, due to conflicts between its members. Even ASEAN is deeply divided over the relations with China, with India intervening as a strategic partner of the US in the region.”

Pointing to the eruption of struggles of workers and youth internationally, the speaker referred to the recent strikes by 180,000 bus workers in Tamil Nadu as well as bank employees and public sector workers last year in India and stoppages by 960,000 IG Metal members in Germany.

“The basic issue confronting these militant workers and the youth is that they can find a solution to what they face only through the political perspective offered by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its organ the *World Socialist Web Site*. These are the central questions that the SEP presents for discussion in our election campaign,” the speaker said.

Dias exposed the bogus election campaigns of the bourgeois political parties and their fake-left backers who claim that the burning social problems facing workers and the poor could be resolved by electing their candidates to the local councils.

Dias quoted a recent press release from the Jaffna Government Agent, the top administrative officer in the area. It referred to lack of industries and acute unemployment. Other statistics revealed there were 30,000

families whose fathers were killed in the anti-Tamil war, farmers were not paid a reasonable price for their produce, and 20,000 families needed homes.

None of these crucial problems could be addressed, Dias said, let alone resolved by the local councils, under the capitalist profit system.

“On top of this, Jaffna is still under military occupation,” Dias said. He noted that the military had a total of 243,000 soldiers and 150,000 of them were occupying Jaffna. “That is one soldier for every seven civilians. The military still holds over 500 acres for their camps in the Jaffna district alone.”

“All these problems call for a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam to find rational solutions. Only the SEP fights for such a political change as part of its program of a federation of socialist republics of South Asia and internationally.”

After the meeting, a Jaffna University student said he and his friends were not going to vote for anyone in the election. “No one has fulfilled their promises. The TNA claims to be the sole representative of Tamil people, but it is divided. All they are concerned about is their own interests, not the problems of Tamil people.”

Revathi, came to the meeting from Kilinochchi, over 60 kilometres away. “This is the first time I’ve been to a political meeting,” she said. “What I found is that your party tells the truth and all the other the parties are working for their own interests.”

Another participant said: “The SEP explains what the capitalist system is and the need for socialist program. Today I understood how the capitalism exploits the working class. The social differences emerge because the resources of the earth are not distributed rationally. Socialism is the only way to establish equality in society.”

The author also recommends:

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