Socialist Equality Party holds election meeting in Sri Lanka

A correspondent
1 December 2001

As part of its campaign for the December 5 election in Sri Lanka, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a public lecture last Wednesday in the Colombo city centre to explain the political situation and the party's policies. About 125 workers, youth and intellectuals heard the address delivered by SEP general secretary, Wije Dias, who heads the party's slate of 24 candidates in the capital.

Wije Dias began by warning that the level of violence and thuggery in the campaign by the two major parties—the ruling Peoples Alliance (PA) and opposition United National Party (UNP)—signalled further attacks on democratic rights after the election. Neither party had any progressive solution to the country's ongoing civil war or falling living standards and would impose the agenda demanded by big business in a dictatorial fashion. He stressed the necessity of building an independent movement of the working class to fight for its own class interests.

Dias said that the election in Sri Lanka, called just one year after the previous one, was taking place in the context of the brutal US-led war in Afghanistan. The war to secure the control of oil and gas resources in Central Asia ushered in a new era of colonialism.

The lecturer explained that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US ruling class had repeatedly used its military power to pursue its interests. The intervention in Afghanistan was the third US-led war following the invasion of Iraq in 1990 and the war against Serbia in 1999. The US exploited the reactionary terrorist attack on New York and Washington and the revulsion over the loss of innocent lives to aggressively pursue its agenda at home and internationally.

"The Bush administration has used this so-called war against terrorism to destroy the democratic rights within the US that were won by the American working class," he said. The war on Afghanistan was also heightening the rivalries between the major powers and intensifying tensions on the subcontinent. India and Pakistan were both seeking to secure their interests while supporting US policies. The world situation had profoundly changed and every country, including Sri Lanka, was affected.

Dias traced the political situation in Sri Lanka since the army's defeat at the hands of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in April last year.

Sri Lanka faced a deep economic crisis, he said. War expenditure had gone up from 52 billion to 85 billion rupees over the last year. Foreign reserves were down to a level sufficient to cover only six weeks of imports. In March, the government was forced to sign an agreement with the IMF to impose a package of tough economic reforms in order to secure a loan of $US253 million.

Big business wanted the PA and UNP to form an alliance to approach the LTTE for negotiations to end the war and create the conditions to implement the IMF's agenda. But their attempts failed and the PA regime entered an agreement with the chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) to shore up its parliamentary majority. When the Bush administration launched its so-called war against terrorism, sections of big business calculated that this created an ideal opportunity to force the LTTE to the negotiating table. But the PA's coalition with the JVP, which is adamantly opposed to any settlement, undercut these plans, and big business moved to force an early election.

Dias explained that all the major parties in Sri Lanka had lined up behind the US-led war. "Immediately after

© World Socialist Web Site

the September 11 attack President Kumaratunga offered Sri Lankan sea ports and airports to the Bush administration for its 'war against terrorism'." No party opposed Kumaratunga's stand in parliament, demonstrating their complete subservience to imperialism.

Echoing the thinking of big business, UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe remarked in a TV interview that "the world situation has changed against terrorism and I will use the situation" to press for talks with the LTTE. He stressed his government would establish "law and order" and "discipline". The UNP was calculating that an agreement with the LTTE would release Sri Lanka's security forces from the civil war in the north and east to use against workers and the poor who would oppose the IMF-dictated attacks.

The SEP general secretary noted that the LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran's birthday speech had also welcomed the US-led war on Afghanistan. "On the one hand, Prabhakaran has lined up behind the imperialists, and, on the other hand, he has indicated his support for the UNP. This attitude shows the LTTE's class interests. He is ready for a deal with Wickremesinghe, but it will not be a deal to establish democratic rights of the Tamil masses, but to secure a region for the Tamil elites for exploitation," he said.

Dias explained that to solve the burning issues facing the masses—ending the war, securing democratic rights, and defending jobs and living standards—the working class had to establish a workers and peasants government to reconstruct society on socialist lines. This program could only be advanced as part of the struggle for international socialism. He said that the SEP, along with its sister parties of the ICFI, was fighting for this perspective through the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The SEP's campaign has been given limited coverage in the media. As a registered party, the SEP was allocated 15 minutes on state-run television and radio to present its program in the Tamil and Sinhala languages. The popular private television channel—*Sirasa*—also invited the SEP to briefly explain its policies in three-minute speeches in Sinhala, Tamil and English as part of its "Election Platform-2001" program. The Tamil daily *Thinakkural* reproduced the SEP election manifesto in full and another Tamil newspaper *Veerakesari* published a substantial report on an SEP press conference.

But in marked comparison to the wide coverage afforded the other parties, including radical groups such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party and Democratic Left Front, the media maintains a virtual blackout on the SEP—the only party that offers a genuine socialist alternative for the working class.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site