# Sri Lankan SEP holds meeting to warn of dangers of war and autocratic rule

**Our correspondents**
**31 August 2005**

Amid Sri Lanka's ongoing political turmoil, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a public meeting at Colombo's Public Library auditorium on August 22 to present a socialist alternative to the mounting social and economic crisis and the danger of communal violence and renewed war. More than a hundred workers, professionals and young people attended the meeting.

Following the assassination of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar on August 12, the Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) have been stirring up communal hostilities and clamouring for action against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). On the day of the SEP meeting, the JVP held a protest in Colombo to denounce the LTTE for Kadirgamar's murder.

SEP political committee member Vilani Peiris chaired the meeting and in her opening remarks explained that the country's prolonged crisis of the parliamentary rule had deepened. "After this assassination the government immediately imposed a state of emergency throughout the island. This repressive measure was supported by all the major parties in Sri Lanka, including the opposition United National Party (UNP) and the JVP.

"The emergency powers have already been used to arrest and detain hundreds of Tamil youths. The essential services regulation is aimed against the growing protest campaigns waged by working people against the economic restructuring policies."

Peiris pointed out that the JVP was openly advocating a return to war in a statement that declared: "Just like the US acted after September 11, 2001 and how Britain reacts to the July 7 bomb blasts this year, Sri Lanka must go forward to crush LTTE terrorism." She explained that the JVP was not only pushing for war but tacitly inviting US and British imperialism to militarily support Colombo's "war on terrorism".

The chairwoman told the audience that the working class could not rely on the old "left" parties—the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party—which have joined the political establishment in immediately blaming the LTTE for Kadirgamar's murder and calling for tougher law-and-order measures. "These parties are a barrier to the development of an independent movement of the working class," she said.

The main speaker was Wije Dias, SEP general secretary and member of the WSWS international editorial board. He began by drawing attention to the barrage of eulogies to Kadirgamar. "In the printed and electronic media Kadirgamar is suddenly raised to the incredible level of a major political figure and a 'hero of this epoch'. The portrayal of his death as an 'unrecoverable national calamity', only reflects the depths of the political crisis that the ruling class faces at present," he said.

Dias explained that President Chandrika Kumaratunga had recruited Kadirgamar, a Tamil, as foreign minister when she first won office in 1994. He was "imported" from London where he had a successful legal career and had worked for the UN. Kumaratunga, handicapped by a lack of intellectuals within her party, particularly anyone prominent from the Tamil community, chose Kadirgamar to become her government's international face. Kumaratunga came to power in 1994 promising peace but rapidly intensified the war.

"Kadirgamar's main role during the last 11 years had been as propagandist, locally and internationally, for the civil war against the LTTE. His value was appreciated across party lines and, even in opposition from 2001 to 2004, the UNP-led government maintained his official security and privileges. One cannot find a single speech, among many he delivered, that dealt with the discrimination and repression confronting the Tamil masses, let alone the burning social issues faced by the working people as a whole," Dias said.

The speaker explained that, when the UNP was in

© World Socialist Web Site

power, Kumaratunga aligned with the JVP in denouncing the ceasefire and the peace negotiations with the LTTE. Kadirgamar played a crucial role for the chauvinist campaign in drawing up a resolution condemning the LTTE's proposals for an interim self-governing authority. After Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party in alliance with the JVP won the April 2004 parliamentary election, Kadirgamar, although ultimately passed over, was the first nominee for prime minister.

Dias pointed to the sharp divisions within the Colombo political establishment. It was significant that Kumaratunga's first statement following Kadirgamar's murder squarely blamed "political foes" opposed to peace. The military and police spokesmen immediately contradicted the president and accused the LTTE without providing a shred of evidence—something that does not normally happen. In a matter of few hours, the president abruptly changed tack and joined the security forces, the JVP and others in denouncing the LTTE.

"We do not hold any brief for the bourgeois nationalist LTTE, which tramples upon the democratic and social rights of the Tamil masses they claim to represent. We do not rule out the possibility that the LTTE killed Kadirgamar for their narrow political aims. But, as a responsible movement of the working class, we have a duty to warn that reactionary political forces, including elements of the military, could have carried out the killing to block any resumption of peace talks and to drag the country back to civil war.

"The tsunami that hit the island last December and the half-hearted attempts by the government to find a working arrangement with LTTE to provide aid intensified the political crisis. The Supreme Court struck down the main clauses of the Post Tsunami Operational Management Structure proposals as unconstitutional. After Kadirgamar's death came the controversy over the date of the next presidential election before the Supreme Court. Whichever way the court decides, political turmoil will increase," Dias said.

"Under conditions of a growing protest movement propelled by the increasing social polarisation and alienation from the main bourgeois parties, the ruling elites are now openly discussing the need for autocratic forms of rule to ensure political stability. The executive presidency has extensive powers. It is significant that virtually all bourgeois parties and their 'left' partners as well as the JVP, JHU and some Tamil and Muslim communal parties supported, openly or tacitly, Kumaratunga's recent declaration of emergency rule. There is also a real threat that a wing of the military or a fascistic formation involving the JVP and the JHU or a combination of both could seize power.

"In this situation, the working class cannot and should not be mere bystanders as the danger of war and autocratic rule intensifies. It must intervene independently to rally all sections of the oppressed masses on the basis of a socialist program that addresses the democratic and social aspirations of working people. The demand for a new constitution, which guarantees genuine democratic rights and which all other parties ignore, is a central issue that the working class is called on to resolve.

"The SEP rejects this present constitution which has already paved the way for a civil war against Tamils and carried out the massacre of Sinhala rural youth in the south. We demand that a democratically elected constituent assembly be called to draft a new constitution that abrogates all repressive and communally discriminative laws and establishes social equality.

"To realise this demand the working class must take the initiative, independent of every bourgeois political party, to mobilise the oppressed masses to establish a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam on the internationalist perspective of a socialist federation of South Asia."

The meeting concluded with a lively question and answer discussion and an appeal for financial support for the SEP. A number of people remained behind for informal discussion and to buy literature from the SEP's display.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**

© World Socialist Web Site