

Sri Lankan SEP holds successful public meeting in Jaffna

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a successful public meeting on “The World Economic Crisis and Imperialist Aggression” last Saturday in Jaffna, the military-occupied capital of northern Sri Lanka. Nearly 60 people participated in the meeting at Navalar Cultural Hall, including workers, farmers, students, fishermen, teachers and housewives.

The meeting took place amid elections for the Jaffna Municipal Council scheduled for August 8. The government called the elections for the Jaffna and Vavuniya local councils to provide a democratic façade for its military occupation of the island’s north and east following the military defeat of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Due to heavy security restrictions in Jaffna, SEP members had to limit their campaigns for the meeting. However, they were able to distribute about 2,000 leaflets and copies of WSWs articles at workplaces, Jaffna University, the main Jaffna bus stand and among fishermen. About 300 posters were put up in Jaffna, and surrounding areas including Ariyalai, Thirunelveli, Anaikoddai, Manipay, Chankanai, Vaddukoddai and Chunnagam.

A regular WSWs reader from Vavuniya, where about 300,000 Tamil civilians are being held in detention camps, sent his greetings to the meeting by telephone. He was unable to attend because the military has not opened the main A9 highway connecting Vavuniya to Jaffna to public transport.

SEP Central Committee member T. Ahilan chaired the meeting. He explained that due to the war the meeting was the first held by the SEP in Jaffna for a long time. The SEP is the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Its forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), was formed in 1968 in a political struggle against the betrayal by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) of the principles of Trotskyism when it entered the bourgeois government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964.

Ahilan explained the meeting was being held under conditions of a profound crisis of global capitalism which was sharply expressed in Sri Lanka. The end of the war would not bring peace and

prosperity but only deepening attacks on the living standards and democratic rights of working people. “The SEP is the only party that advances a socialist program for the working class in the midst of this deepening crisis of capitalism,” he said.

The main speaker, SEP Central Committee member Myilvaganam Thevarajah, began by saying: “Nearly three decades of civil war have ended but anti-Tamil discrimination and repression is continuing. Up to 300,000 Tamil civilians have been incarcerated in detention camps without basic facilities. The military occupation of the North and East is being strengthened. President Mahinda Rajapakse has declared an economic war on the working class. We can’t understand what is happening in Sri Lanka, or in any country, without understanding the unfolding world crisis.”

The speaker referred to the last major capitalist breakdown that resulted in two world wars and the Great Depression. “After the Second World War, US imperialism took responsibility for stabilising the world economy through a series of regulatory measures. It was able to do so as a result of its vast economic power compared to other imperialist countries that were devastated by the war.”

Thevarajah explained that the post-war economic arrangements began to break down in the 1970s as US economic hegemony began to wane. “The US is seeking to use its residual military power to maintain its global dominance in the world as a means to overcome its decline. The invasion of Afghanistan and the war on Iraq, which is rich in oil resources, are part of that attempt.”

He said that the Obama administration’s focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan was aimed at furthering US economic and strategic ambitions, particularly in resource-rich Central Asia. South Asia, including Sri Lanka, has become a key arena of rivalry between the major powers.

“Over the past 30 years, the Tamil masses have suffered a great deal because of the racist war waged by successive Colombo governments. The anti-Tamil war was used to divide the working class along ethnic lines. When the Rajapakse government plunged the country back to war, all the major powers, including the US, China and India supported Colombo to advance their own

interests,” he said.

“The LTTE’s military defeat was bound up with its bankrupt perspective of a separate Tamil capitalist state. To achieve its aim, the LTTE always looked to the support of this or that major power. They never called for the unity of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers and workers in India and internationally against the communal discrimination of the Colombo government. This hostility towards the working class underlines the fact that the LTTE represented the interests of a section of the Tamil bourgeoisie.”

Thevarajah said that none of the parties contesting the Jaffna and Vavuniya elections defended the interests of working people. He cited the election manifesto of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which called for “a plan for political solution that would establish the autonomy of Tamils and Muslims within the north-east Tamil motherland.”

“This ‘political solution’ has nothing to do with the needs of Tamil masses but is aimed at a settlement with the Colombo government to secure the privileges of the Tamil bourgeoisie,” he said. The TNA, previously a mouthpiece for the LTTE, has been seeking an accommodation with the Rajapakse government. The speaker cited the appeals of TNA leaders for international help, including from India to achieve a “political solution.” This party is completely dependent on the various world and regional powers, he declared.

Thevarajah also quoted from Douglas Devananda, a government minister and head of the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP), who claimed that his party would win the rights of Tamil people through friendly collaboration with the government instead of confrontation.

“This is another party of the Tamil bourgeoisie seeking political crumbs,” he said. “It supported Rajapakse’s war against the Tamil people and operated a paramilitary group associated with the military. Other parties of the Tamil elite include Tamil United Liberation Front. What we heard from people over the past few days is their hatred of all these parties. Every section of the Tamil bourgeoisie has shown they are a corrupt and impotent lot seeking to cut a deal with Colombo at the expense of masses.”

Thevarajah said that the whole experience of Tamil people in Sri Lanka had vindicated the SEP’s political perspective. The RCL/SEP was the only party in Sri Lanka to consistently demand the unconditional withdrawal of the military from North and East of the island from the outset of the war. The democratic rights of Tamil people can only be realised through a unified political struggle by the working class—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslims—against capitalist rule for a United Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as a part of a Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally. He urged the audience to study the perspective of the SEP and ICFI on the *World Socialist Web Site* and to join and build the SEP.

There was an enthusiastic response to the speeches with many people staying behind to discuss the issues with SEP members. More than 3,000 rupees was raised for the party’s fund.

Kanakaratnam, a technical officer, explained: “We have to organise these types of meetings on socialism at several places. This election will not bring anything for the people. People die daily in refugee camps. They want freedom from those camps.”

An employee from Jaffna University said: “We will support more meetings like this. This website is a very good medium but in Jaffna 90 percent of people do not have access to the Internet. It is necessary to publish your program through leaflets and other publications and to discuss it with people.”

A Jaffna University student told the WWS: “This local government election is not necessary. There are 300,000 people in detention camps. In this situation who will benefit from this election?”

A fisherman added: “We can’t accept this election. Most people are in detention camps. We have no rights to move about freely. The 24 hour fishing [announced by the government] is only words, but it has not been realised practically.”

A.G. Muththiah, a former Lanka Sama Samaja Party member, said: “I believe in international socialism. In 1964, when the LSSP decided to join coalition government of Sirima Bandaranaike, there was a party meeting in Jaffna. I also participated in it. Because of that betrayal, we are suffering today. Although I lost interest in politics, after this meeting I want to maintain contact with you.”



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