

Sri Lankan army attempts to block SEP meeting in Jaffna

Our correspondent
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Despite disruptive actions by the military and the police in the military-occupied city of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka, workers, youth and housewives participated in a well-attended June 19 public meeting organised by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) on “The Middle East upheavals and the theory of the permanent revolution.”

Two days before the meeting, army officers prevailed on the Jaffna Multi Purpose Cooperative Society not to allow the SEP to use its venue, even though it had been booked weeks earlier. Managers told organisers that the army planned to hold a meeting in the hall on that day. When SEP supporters objected that the party had already paid for the hall, managers said they could not permit the meeting as there might be “disruptions.”

The officials did not elaborate on who wanted to disrupt the meeting but cited an attack on a meeting held by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA)—a Tamil bourgeois party—in a Jaffna suburb on June 15. The TNA accused the army of breaking into its campaign meeting for local government elections, assaulting participants and chasing them away. The Jaffna armed forces commander denied any involvement by the security forces, but such attacks cannot be carried out in the north and east of Sri Lanka without their participation or assistance.

The SEP had to book the nearby Weerasingham Hall to hold its meeting. In a further bid to intimidate party supporters, army officers went there too and photocopied the SEP application form to hire the hall.

Harassment also occurred during the two-week SEP campaign for the meeting. Thousands of leaflets and articles from the *World Socialist Web Site* were distributed in Jaffna, Chavakachcheri, Jaffna University and several other areas. Army and police squads

patrolling Jaffna took down the names, addresses and national ID card numbers of SEP supporters. Pro-government thugs and police officers tore up SEP posters in broad daylight.

These attempts to block the SEP meeting are indicative of the police-state measures in force throughout the North and East of the island against ordinary working people. Despite the government’s claims that it “liberated” the Tamil masses by defeating the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), what has been put in place is a permanent military occupation.

Chairing the public meeting, R. Sambandan of the SEP central committee denounced the army’s attempt to sabotage the meeting. He noted: “The security forces are particularly sensitive that youth and workers in the north and east are learning lessons from the Middle East uprisings. Such mass unrest could reverberate here. With the military defeat of the LTTE and the exposure of the bankruptcy and reactionary nature of its separatist politics, Tamil people are seeking a way out.”

Delivering the main report, Nanda Wickremasinghe, also from the SEP Central Committee, described the uprising of workers and youth in Tunisia and Egypt in the first two months of this year. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, the dictators of Tunisia and Egypt respectively, had been ousted by mass struggles, but a new political stage had commenced.

“It has not taken long for the workers in Egypt to realise that they had been duped; that none of the democratic and social rights that they had demanded were realised: an end to emergency rule and police and military repression,

decent employment, the right to organise and a halt to soaring prices,” he said.

Wickremasinghe explained: “Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, who took over after Mubarak, is a man backed by the same reactionary forces. He acts as an agent of US imperialism. The workers have mobilised in their thousands to call for a ‘second revolution.’

“This confirms the theory of the permanent revolution that Leon Trotsky developed: unless the working class takes the power and proceeds to accomplish socialist tasks, the masses will not be able to secure democratic rights.”

This lesson was directly relevant to the struggle for the democratic rights of the Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka, Wickremasinghe explained. After decades of separatist politics, led by the Tamil bourgeois organisations including the TNA and the LTTE, the people had been driven to destitution and into a political blind alley.

Wickremasinghe said the uprisings in the Middle East had opened a new period of an international revolutionary offensive by the working class, the social force that could give leadership to the oppressed masses. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, due to the betrayal of the Stalinist bureaucracy, many people had ruled out any prospect of the working class coming on the scene.

The speaker referred to a remark made by TNA parliamentarian Suresh Premachandran at a public meeting the previous day in Jaffna. Premachandran had said that the repression against the Tamils could be solved through the intervention of the “international community,” especially the US.

Wickremasinghe pointed out that these major powers had supported Rajapakse’s war. If they were now criticising the government, it was to reinforce their own strategic and economic interests. The TNA was depending on the capitalist powers and also bargaining with the government, in order to secure privileges for the Tamil elite. Rejecting this capitalist line, Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers alike had to unite across ethnic lines and turn to the international working class.

Wickremasinghe said that the only way out was to fight

for a workers’ and peasants’ government in the form of a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic as part of a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia in the struggle for international socialism. He urged workers and youth to join the SEP to struggle for this perspective.

During the SEP campaign there was discussion about the connection between the experiences of the civil war, the uprisings in the Middle East and the Sri Lankan government’s violent police response to the protests that had erupted among free trade zone (FTZ) workers against a planned pension scheme.

A university student said: “It is right that the workers should step on to the streets against the oppressive regime. This shows that only the working class can give leadership to the struggle against the Rajapakse government. We condemn the attack on the free trade zone workers and the killing of the young workers and the wounding of other workers. The workers of Egypt have set us an example.”

Rasik, a Muslim worker, also condemned the attack on the FTZ workers. He commented: “You alone talk of uniting the working class across religious and national divides. Just as in the Middle East, here too the working class should unite against the oppressive regime. I used to support the UNP [a right-wing bourgeois party]. It was responsible for the murder of hundreds during the 1983 [anti-Tamil] riots. After that I left the UNP. I do not support any party now. All the old parties are alike. Your program has given me hope.”



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