

SEP holds meeting in Jaffna despite military threats

Our correspondent
25 January 2013

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held a successful lecture on its perspectives document, *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, in war-torn Jaffna on January 20, despite efforts by the government's defence ministry officials to prevent the meeting from going ahead. The lecture was conducted at the entrance of the advertised venue, Weerasingham Hall, which had been closed by the management, citing "an order of the defence ministry". (See: "Sri Lankan SEP condemns defence ministry ban on Jaffna meeting")

SEP members and supporters had campaigned for the meeting in towns, islets and university campuses on the Jaffna Peninsula, selling about 100 copies of the perspectives document during the campaign. As a result, nearly 50 people came to hear the lecture, including workers, housewives, university and school students, fishermen and party supporters.

As preparations proceeded for the lecture, military and police intelligence officers patrolled in a threatening manner on motorbikes, keeping a close watch on the people gathering for the event.

Chairing the meeting, SEP central committee member P.T. Sambandan condemned the actions by the government and the military as an attack on the party's fundamental democratic rights. "The world working class is entering into revolutionary struggles against capitalism," he explained. "The ban on this lecture expresses the government's fear of the impending struggles of the working people in Sri Lanka and of the SEP taking the leadership of these struggles."

Sambandan contrasted the SEP's proud historical record, set out in the *Foundations* document, with that of the pseudo-left groups, such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party. They could not even write their own histories, because each consisted of supporting one

capitalist party or another. "In Sri Lanka, only the SEP and its forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League, could document 45 years of consistently providing an international socialist perspective to the working class, as part of the fight to build a revolutionary leadership," he said.

Delivering the main report, SEP central committee member M. Thevarajah explained the significance of publishing the SEP's founding document in the context of the developing class struggles produced by the worldwide economic meltdown.

"In the present capitalist economic crisis, not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the ruling class in every country has unleashed attacks on living conditions, and social and democratic rights won in bitter struggles," Thevarajah said. "At the same time, the major imperialist countries, particularly the US, are seeking to establish their hegemony, using military power to re-colonise countries, unleashing tensions between the rival powers."

Thevarajah pointed to the systematic US encirclement of China, which was greatly increasing military tensions. He explained that imperialist rivalry had led to two world wars during the 20th century, and that the same threat was posed again. Expectations of global economic recovery had proved false, confirming the analysis of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) that a systemic breakdown of capitalism had occurred.

The speaker drew attention to the political experiences of the social convulsions that had erupted in Egypt and across the Middle East since 2011. "Despite the workers in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt entering into revolutionary struggles, the working class was unable take power because of a crisis of perspective and leadership." It was only the

ICFI and its sections that had historically developed the revolutionary perspective of international socialism, he said, and this was contained in the SEP's *Foundations* .

Thevarajah also emphasised the lessons of the defeat of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009. The LTTE's demise had underscored the political bankruptcy of Tamil nationalism, based as it was on establishing a capitalist state, and rejecting the revolutionary role of the working class. "The perspective of the socialist unification of the working class at the head of the rural poor is essential," he stressed. There was no national solution for workers and the oppressed masses, including the Tamil people.

Concluding the lecture, Thevarajah denounced the military's ban on the SEP meeting and thanked the participants. He said the ban demonstrated that the military ruled the north of Sri Lanka and that the government wanted to extend police-state rule all over the country. He urged the participants to join the SEP to build it as a mass party.

Members of the audience spoke to the WWS. A housewife commented: "I can't accept the rejection of this hall for the meeting. Is there no right even to discuss a socialist book here? I vehemently condemn this."

A university student praised the SEP for holding the meeting despite the military's ban: "I didn't know about socialism before I met your people. I welcome your decision to hold this meeting amid the threat."

A government employee said: "It is clear, through the blocking of the meeting, what kind of administration rules this country."

News of the military's bid to block the meeting was published by a number of newspapers and web sites in Jaffna, and the Jaffna-based *Thinakkural*, *Valampuri* and *Uthayan* carried reports of the meeting itself.



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