

# Sri Lankan SEP holds its first election meeting in Jaffna

Our correspondents  
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Around 70 workers, youth, fishermen and housewives attended a successful public meeting organised by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) last Saturday in Oori, on Karainagar Island, about 20 kilometres west of Jaffna town. It was the first meeting of the party's campaign for the September 21 Northern Provincial Council elections, in which the SEP is running a slate of 19 candidates in the Jaffna district.

SEP members and supporters conducted a door-to-door campaign in the villages of Oori, Valanthalai, Kalabhoomi and Pittiyellai in the days before the meeting, distributing thousands of copies of the party's election manifesto. In response, the government deployed the military and police in these areas, with commandos patrolling on motor bikes to intimidate residents. Some of the SEP's meeting posters were found torn down.

Desperate to hoodwink voters, President Mahinda Rajapakse's government has suddenly introduced some limited relief projects, including the recent provision of electricity, and is currently distributing free water. Residents normally have to pay one rupee for a litre of water, which is supplied by private companies.

Karainagar Island is deeply polarised between a tiny minority of wealthy businessmen and the vast majority of oppressed residents. The whole area was placed under the control of the Sri Lankan navy during the protracted war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Hundreds of people were killed during the war. Many families left the area, and only a few have returned. Ruined houses can be seen all around Karainagar.

Oori has a population of about 400 families, mainly involved in the fishing industry. They live under difficult social conditions. Residents have to walk at least one-and-a-half kilometres to access public transport. The local school only has classes up to level five. Students seeking further education must walk four kilometres to another

school.

Chairing the meeting, SEP candidate V. Kamalathanan pointed out that the SEP was the only party advancing a socialist and internationalist program against the danger of war against China and the deepening attack on living conditions and basic democratic rights. He explained that all the other parties—the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), United National Party (UNP), Rajapakse's United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—were based on capitalist and communal politics.

SEP political committee member M. Thevarajah reviewed the political track record of the Tamil bourgeois parties and explained the principled struggle conducted by the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), predecessor of the SEP, when it ran for election in the same area during the 1977 general elections.

“The RCL fought to unify Sinhala and Tamil workers in the struggle for a workers' and peasants' government, not only against the Colombo elite's Sinhala chauvinist policies, but in opposition to the communal Tamil bourgeois parties, mainly the Federal Party, Tamil Congress and Ceylon Workers Congress, which advanced a ‘separate state’ slogan,” Thevarajah explained.

The fight by the RCL and SEP for a socialist and internationalist program against all the Tamil bourgeois parties, including the LTTE, was vindicated in the ensuing years, he said.

Paramu Thirugnanasambanthar, who heads the SEP's election slate, said the elections had nothing to do with establishing democracy but were only being held because of growing pressure on the Rajapakse government by the US and India, which were demanding that the Colombo administration distance itself from China.

The Sri Lankan government, Thirugnanasambanthar continued, was planning to further escalate social austerity measures against workers and peasants in the

coming period. It aimed to win the elections and then use the outcome as “justification” for escalating its police-state measures to suppress the inevitable popular opposition against its policies.

Thirugnanasambanthar reviewed the brutal experiences of Colombo’s war and the LTTE’s anti-democratic administration in the areas it controlled. He explained the politically bankrupt and reactionary nature of the LTTE’s separatist program.

“The Tamil bourgeois leaders, including the LTTE, never took a position against imperialism. Instead, they always appeal to imperialism and to India for help. The TNA’s aim is to safeguard its privileges through a power-sharing arrangement with the Colombo government.”

Thirugnanasambanthar reviewed the worsening social conditions in the northern region. “From the beginning of the year, there were 154 suicide cases in the Jaffna district alone, mostly due to deprived economic conditions,” he said. “There are no jobs for young people; the lack of housing and clean water is a major problem; and with the ongoing military occupation people have no social life.”

Delivering the concluding address, SEP political committee member Panini Wijesiriwardane explained that the Rajapakse government was escalating its social austerity measures in line with the worsening international economic crisis. He pointed out that the recent murderous army assault against Weliveriya villagers, who were protesting against the contamination of water in their area, demonstrated to ordinary Sinhala people the brutal methods that the Colombo government used against Tamils during the war in Sri Lanka’s North and East.

Wijesiriwardane outlined the SEP’s socialist and internationalist program. The SEP, he said, opposed all forms of divisive communal politics and the continuing military occupation of the North and the East.

Wijesiriwardane exposed the UNP, which is currently attempting to present itself as a champion of democracy, pointing out that this party began the civil war to suppress the democratic rights of Tamils in 1983. He also explained how pseudo-left organisations, such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party and United Socialist Party, were “promoting the UNP to prevent the emergence of an independent working class movement.”

The speaker added: “The TNA is trying to present the United Nations as the saviour of the people, while appealing to US imperialism, which carried out wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and is now about to attack Syria.”

In conclusion, Wijesiriwardane called for a unified struggle of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers to rally all

the oppressed masses to establish a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally. He urged workers, youth and the intellectuals to support the SEP election campaign and join the party.

Several audience members remained after the meeting to speak with SEP candidates.

Kiruban said: “Because I couldn’t survive by fishing, I went to Saudi Arabia as a worker. I spent three years there, but the salary was very low and the workload unbearable. As a result of the global crisis, lots of factories closed and I couldn’t find a better job. Finally, I decided to return home and start fishing again. I think what you’ve said today in the meeting is right.”

Yasodharan, a carpenter, explained his experiences: “Four years since the end of the war, none of the problems we face have been resolved, and we can’t expect any concessions from this government. While there is some infrastructure development in the North, this is not providing any benefit to us. We don’t have proper supplies of drinking water but have to try pay to for it, and all sorts of other basic things, on an average monthly income of just 6,000 rupees [\$US45].

“Look at the houses around this meeting hall. They’re only suitable for chickens, not humans. We suffer from the rain and the heat of the sun. Actually, we don’t have any of our basic needs fulfilled. As the SEP says, without socialism we cannot meet our basic needs.”

The SEP’s next public meeting will be held on September 2, at 4 p.m., at Weerasingham Hall in Jaffna. We urge workers, young people to attend this important event.



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