

SEP campaign team discusses US war threat to Syria

Our correspondent
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In the Northern Provincial Council election, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka is the only party raising the dangers posed by the US threat of war against Syria. The SEP is contesting the Jaffna district with a slate of 19 candidates. A public meeting opposing the US war drive against Syria will be held in Jaffna on Sunday.

Workers and youth who spoke to the SEP drew from their experience of the protracted communal war waged by successive Colombo governments against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam that ended in the LTTE's defeat in May 2009. The war devastated much of the North and East of Sri Lanka.

In the election campaign, the main Tamil bourgeois party, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), is proposing a power-sharing arrangement with the Colombo government that will benefit the Tamil elites. The SEP is fighting to unite the working class—Tamil and Sinhala—on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.

Speaking to WSWs reporters, an advanced-level student declared: “What right has America to conduct a war against Syria? I think the chemical weapons allegation is a lie to carry out a war.”

She explained that the US was an imperialist country and Syria a small country. The US was trying to spread its domination, she said, and agreed that the attack on Syria could become a wider war and that would be horrific. “You should try to mobilise workers against the war.”

Speaking about the SEP's election manifesto, she said: “The US wants to stop China economically competing with it and to undermine it. Wherever [in the world], America is seeking to use its power.”

In the beginning, she said, the LTTE had a connection with the poor, but later it became a rich

people's party, adapting to the bourgeoisie. She explained: “The TNA [Tamil National Alliance] is a capitalist party. I agree with the idea that working class unite and fight to win our rights.”

A first-year university student asked: “When we have so many questions here, why are you talking about Syria and not those?”

An SEP campaigner explained that the US war drive against Syria was a question for working people in every country. “Moved by its geo-political interests, the US is attempting to regain its hegemony over the world using its military power. When China emerged as a second major economic power in the world, the US, with the support of other imperialist countries, began to prepare for war. This is the meaning of its strategy of the ‘pivot to Asia.’ Only the working class is capable of stopping this war.”

He also explained the TNA's reactionary position: whatever the US has done elsewhere in the world, the TNA turns to Washington to “solve the problems of Tamil people.” The TNA is seeking the support of the imperialist powers to cut a deal with the Colombo government in the class interests of the Tamil elite.

Others joined the discussion. One worker asked: “How could they [workers] stop the war?”

An SEP team member replied: “The working class is the producer for the entire world. It must be organised globally and across all language or national divisions. Uniting under a socialist banner, the international working class can fight against war, bringing capitalism to an end.

A fisherman, who enthusiastically followed the conversation, added: “We will face the immediate issue of rising fuel prices. If war starts, the government will increase the fuel prices and hence prices of other goods. Won't we go hungry if that happens?”

A woman worker described her own experience:

“After hearing what you said, I started feeling that we could face a horrible war that cannot even compare to what we had here over the past 30 years. What happened to us should not happen to Syrian people. Wars should not begin anywhere. I lost two of my children to war. The first one was forcefully recruited to LTTE and died. The second one was living in the Vanni region during 2009 in the final stages of the war. He has been missing since then.

“My husband died in agony after what happened to our children. I’m currently living a difficult life with our remaining two children in a rented house. The distress and shock of the war still haunts me and when I hear about another war it brings a chill to my mind. I oppose this war against Syria.”

The SEP team spoke to others during the campaign.

A worker, who had read the SEP manifesto, said: “There’s no party that can solve the problems of the people in Sri Lanka, including Tamils. I came to understand this from my own experience. I’ve read your manifesto and can accept your international program and your statement that the only solution to all problems is the socialist revolution.”

The worker said all the major powers were responsible for the military’s killing of thousands of people in Mullaivaikkal during the final days of the war. “It’s interesting that without caste, race, language and religious differences, everyone should be considered as human beings. I think this is the international socialist program. I also think you are the people who are behaving accordingly.” He criticised parties that serve their own self-interest. “Members change their parties to secure more privileges,” he said, adding that if the TNA aligned with the government he would not be surprised.

Another person who personally experienced the Mullaivaikkal killings said his survival was a miracle. “America, which is seeking to use its power, is trying to attack Syria,” he said. “If that happened there could be a world war. We don’t want war.”



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