

Sri Lanka: SEP presidential candidate addresses Colombo meeting

Our correspondents
20 December 2014

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) presidential candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena, a member of the SEP political committee and retired teacher with an almost four-decade record of fighting for the working class, outlined the party's election program last week at a public meeting. Held on December 12 in Maharagama, about 15 kilometres from Colombo, it was the first in a series of SEP and IYSSE meetings for the January 8 presidential election.

Attended by workers and students, the meeting was also addressed by International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) member Suranga Siriwardena and SEP national secretary Wije Dias.

The party's election intervention, Wijesiriwardena told the meeting, was part of the struggle for "an independent political movement of the working class based on an international socialist perspective and in opposition to the growing danger of imperialist war and attacks on living conditions and democratic rights."

The speaker referred to the recent US Senate Foreign Relations Committee resolution empowering President Barack Obama to intervene militarily in Syria and Iraq.

"This is the first time since the end of World War II that a country has openly admitted that it was preparing for a world war. As secretary of state John Kerry explained, the resolution was an open license for Obama to launch war abroad. It has no limitations on when and where the military operation can occur or the means to be used," Wijesiriwardena warned.

The speaker also referred to Obama's speech at the recent G20 summit in Australia where he made clear that Washington's policy in Europe to confront Russia, and its policy in Asia to isolate and encircle China, were part of the same aggressive imperialist policy.

Wijesiriwardena said US efforts to force the Sri Lankan government of President Mahinda Rajapakse to

break its close ties with Beijing and back Washington's "pivot" against China were behind the current political crisis in Colombo. The US will not tolerate Rajapakse's attempts to maintain close relations with both Beijing and Washington.

"Rajapakse's health minister Maithripala Sirisena has defected from the government and become the 'common opposition candidate' in order to more closely embrace US imperialism," Wijesiriwardena said.

"He has been selected and promoted by former president Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is an adviser to the Clinton Global Initiative. This organisation is affiliated to the US-based Clinton Foundation, which is notorious for its behind-the-scene operations in countries whose governments do not toe the line for American foreign policy.

"United National Party leader Ranil Wickremesinghe and former foreign minister Mangala Samaraweera played leading roles in bringing about Sirisena's candidacy. Wickremesinghe is well known for his pro-American stand and Samaraweera broke with the Rajapakse government over its close ties with Beijing."

Commenting on Sirisena's calls for "the abolition of the executive presidency," the SEP candidate explained that Rajapakse's autocratic rule "was not a product of his personality but was needed to impose brutal austerity measures dictated by international finance capital. If elected, Sirisena will act in a similar way and continue the same austerity measures."

The SEP candidate warned that "unless the international working class, the only social force capable of preventing the danger of world war, takes its destiny into its own hands by assuming political power, crisis-ridden capitalism threatens mankind with another world conflagration."

SEP assistant national secretary Deepal Jayasekera, who chaired the meeting, also reviewed the international context in which the Sri Lankan elections were being held and emphasised that the SEP placed the struggle against imperialist war at the centre of its election campaign.

IYSSE member Suranga Siriwardena detailed the difficult social conditions facing youth in Sri Lanka and worldwide as the ruling elites imposed the burden of the growing economic crisis of capitalism on the back of working people and the oppressed masses.

In the final remarks at the Maharagama meeting, SEP general secretary Wije Dias said that the Sri Lankan election was being held at a critical political juncture.

“President Rajapakse called the election two years ahead of schedule,” Dias said, “because he fears that if he serves his full term the popular anger against his austerity agenda will deepen and undermine his chances of re-election.”

The speaker told the meeting that “arguments are being made that the SEP’s exposure of Sirisena will assist Rajapakse. This is not a new claim and is aimed at trying to pressure the SEP into Sirisena’s political orbit.

“The SEP has proven throughout its history that it knows how to fight imperialism without capitulating to the national bourgeoisie. The national bourgeoisie in backward countries like Sri Lanka are compradors, subservient to imperialism. Rajapakse is no different even though he came from a village. Even the Indian bourgeoisie, which presided over a mass anti-imperialist movement, proved its organic incapacity of fighting its imperialist masters and capitulated in 1947 to Britain’s partition of India along communal lines.”

Dias pointed out that the SEP was the only organisation warning about the growing threat of war. “These dangers are being deliberately hidden by all other parties which are attempting to drag working people and the oppressed into another imperialist conflict.”

Dias said that the International Monetary Fund’s demand for cuts to the Sri Lankan budget deficit, which had “paved the way for the gutting of social programmes and public welfare,” had never been opposed by Sirisena. “Workers and other oppressed masses will face vicious attacks from the ruling class whoever wins the presidency on January 8,” the

speaker said.

Dias explained that claims by opposition parties that a Sirisena victory would lead to a new constitution and abolition of the executive presidency were bogus. “This is an attempt to cover up real issues of war and social counter-revolution confronting the working people,” he said. “No faith should be placed in new bourgeois constitutions, which were aimed at slashing even the limited rights of ordinary people ...

“The SEP advocates the drafting of a new constitution by a constitutional assembly elected for that particular purpose by a popular vote. We raise this demand as part of the party’s struggle to independently mobilise the working class on a revolutionary program to overthrow the capitalist order as a whole,” Dias said.



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