

SEP presidential campaign underway in war-ravaged northern Sri Lanka

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have launched a vigorous campaign in the Jaffna area of northern Sri Lanka for the SEP's presidential candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena ahead of the January 8 election.

Well-attended public meetings addressed by Wijesiriwardena were held in Kayts, Karainagar, and Jaffna city on December 26, 27, and 28 respectively. SEP and IYSSE members and supporters distributed around 2,000 Tamil-language copies of the party's election manifesto, visiting working class and economically-oppressed neighbourhoods in areas including Jaffna city, Gurunagar, Kayts, Velanai, Thuraiyoor, Karainagar, Valanthai, Oori and Thirunalveli.

The SEP has a long history in northern Sri Lanka of fighting for an international socialist and revolutionary program against both successive governments in Colombo and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). SEP members in the area have faced military-police repression and also physical attacks and threats from the LTTE and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), part of the ruling coalition of President Mahinda Rajapakse.

People expressed widespread hatred towards Rajapakse's government when speaking with SEP campaigners. Most of them do not trust in Maithripala Sirisena, who defected from the government to challenge Rajapakse as the "common opposition candidate" backed by several opposition parties, including the United National Party (UNP).

A fisherman said: "Rajapakse is trying to be in power forever. The UNP, which started the war, now promotes Sirisena. We will not trust him either. You criticise all of them. Your ideas are good. A separate organisation like yours should be built."

Another fisherman who returned from Mullivaikkal where the last stage of Rajapakse's war against the LTTE took place, told the SEP: "My wife died in Mullivaikkal during the war. Now, along with my children, I am staying with a relative, and we cannot live like this anymore. It's difficult to maintain a family. I don't see any difference between Rajapakse and Sirisena."

A former LTTE cadre, who was put in a "rehabilitation camp" by the Rajapakse administration, said: "The government promised me and thousands of others who were 'rehabilitated' that we would receive loans to start businesses or to find jobs. But nothing happened. Instead they have planted police intelligence agents to watch our activities. Those intelligence officials visit us regularly. So we cannot be involved in any political work against government."

A teacher from Jaffna explained that he had already cast his postal vote for Sirisena because most of his colleagues had discussed the need to remove Rajapakse. "Yesterday I read Sirisena's 100 days program—but it says nothing about Tamil people's problems," he said. "I don't know why the TNA [Tamil National Alliance, a coalition of Tamil bourgeois parties] support Sirisena."

"After the discussion with you I realise the situation. Sirisena was with Rajapakse during the war against the Tamil people. Yes, the US is behind the scenes promoting Sirisena. The US is talking about the human rights of Tamil people, but they supported the Rajapakse government during the war. If I met you before voting I would have voted for your candidate."

A small shop keeper from Kayts said: "I have known your party for a long time as consistently fighting for socialism. I have no faith in either Rajapakse or Sirisena. The TNA calls on America to defend human

rights in Sri Lanka. This is a big joke. America killed thousands of people in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. America knows Sri Lanka is a geographically important place for their military preparations in Asia.”

Around 50 people, including public sector workers, fishermen, farmers, youth, housewives, and teachers and students from different areas of the Jaffna peninsula participated in the SEP election meeting held at Weerasingham Hall in Jaffna.

Wijesiriwardena pointed out that it was the only political meeting held in Jaffna so far for the January 8 election. This reflects the political bankruptcy of all the other parties, he emphasised. Welcoming the participants, he said: “In spite of the media black-out against the SEP campaign you have come to this meeting because you need to know our perspective.”

Wijesiriwardena continued: “Rajapakse brought forward the presidential election by two years because he feared the further development of popular opposition against his austerity measures in line with IMF dictates. He aims to hold office and then intensify these social counter-revolutionary measures.”

Wijesiriwardena pointed out that the SEP had warned in its 2013 northern provincial council election campaign that the election of the TNA to Jaffna’s provincial administration would not improve the conditions of Tamil working people and poor. This has been vindicated.

“In the same way,” the SEP candidate continued, “whether Rajapakse or Sirisena wins the January 8 election, your problems will be further aggravated. The IMF will dictate the terms to whoever comes to office, and the austerity measures will be accelerated. Not only that, they will drag the country into the maelstrom of Washington’s preparations for war against China that threatens to trigger another world war.”

Wijesiriwardena explained: “No any other party in this election campaign speaks about the growing threat of war. They keep you in dark. The SEP is the only party which is exposing the preparations for world war being made by the US-led imperialists. Washington, under its ‘pivot to Asia,’ is militarily encircling China while at the same time provoking conflict with Russia. The SEP, in collaboration with its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), is fighting to mobilise the working class not only in Sri Lanka but around the world in an anti-war

movement based on international socialism to abolish capitalism, the root cause of war.”

Paramu Thirugnanasambanthar, an SEP Central Committee member who chaired the Jaffna meeting, explained that the SEP fights to unite Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers on a socialist program against the entire Colombo political establishment, including Rajapakse and Sirisena, and also the Tamil elite, including the TNA.

SEP Political Committee member M. Thevarajah explained the consistent and principled political struggle of the SEP and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), against three-decades of civil war, demanding the withdrawal of the Sri Lanka military from the North and East and also opposing LTTE’s separatist programme.

S. Janani, a member of the Jaffna IYSSE branch, pointed to the miserable conditions faced by young people under the Rajapakse government and warned that the situation will further worsen after the election. He insisted that the future of the youth depended on the fight for socialism.

Participants of the meeting stayed back afterwards and spoke with SEP members. Ananda, a teacher said: “I am aware that there is a tense situation building up all over the world. However no one talks about it other than your party.”

A media student said: “I had no knowledge about another world war. I came to know about it though your meeting. I am unable to believe this. But I have to believe it after hearing the speeches. Already we are severely affected by the civil war. Many countries have nuclear weapons. So a world war would be a disaster.”

A building worker said: “We came to know about the international war threat through the SEP. This would be much more dangerous than the civil war we experienced. Yes, workers must be mobilised to oppose this war preparation.”



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