SEP campaign receives support in northern Sri Lanka

Our correspondent
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Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) campaigned among workers, fishermen, housewives, youth and retired people in Karainagar for the party's second election meeting in northern Sri Lanka. The SEP is fielding 43 candidates for the August 17 general election in three districts—the capital Colombo, the northern area of Jaffna and the plantation district of Nuwaraeliya.

In lively discussions with SEP campaigners, people in Karainagar often voiced contempt for, and opposition to, the main bourgeois Tamil party, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), and hostility to the ongoing military occupation of the northern region, more than six years after the end of the government's communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Karainagar is an island connected to Jaffna via a long causeway. About half the residents are fishing families and the rest are workers, government servants and farmers. Many families who were displaced due to the war were dumped there without basic facilities, while new military camps were established in the area. Partly-damaged houses and building debris are visible symbols of more than two decades of communal war. Many poor fishing families depend on catching prawns in the lagoons.

The election meeting was held on July 31 in the fishing village of Oori, about 20 kilometres from Jaffna. More than 50 people, including fishermen, farmers, teachers, housewives and students, attended, while several hundred people listened to the meeting outside.

SEP general secretary Wije Dias was the main speaker, and SEP candidate V. Kamalathasan chaired the meeting. Other speakers were Paramu Thirugnanasampanthar, who leads the SEP slate in Jaffna, Pankaja Jayawickrema, representing the IYSSE, and SEP candidate Rasaratnam Balagowry.

Thirugnanasampanthar pointed out that the election had international significance as Sri Lanka was being drawn into the preparations being made by US imperialism for war. The speaker referred to the US backing for Maithripala Sirisena to win last January's presidential election in order to remove Mahinda Rajapakse, who established close ties to China. "The regime-change operation in the presidential election in January was a part of these war preparations and now those involved are seeking to strengthen this government in this general election," he said.

Wije Dias called for a vote for the SEP candidates as a mark of support for the party's revolutionary socialist program. He explained that the SEP was not promoting the illusion that the burning problems the people face can be solved through a parliamentary form of rule. He insisted that only by abolishing the profit system and establishing socialism could the problems confronting workers, fishermen, farmers, housewives, students and unemployed youth be resolved.

"For the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism, a workers' and farmers' government, in the form of a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, has to be brought to power," Dias declared.

Dias explained that the separatist LTTE was militarily crushed because of its false political perspective of placing faith in India and the imperialist powers to work out a deal with the Colombo government to secure privileges for the Tamil elite. "This experience, once again, proved tragically the incapacity of the bourgeoisie to achieve the democratic rights of working people. The national bourgeoisie,

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both Sinhala and Tamil, vehemently opposes the strivings toward the unity of the working class across communal divisions."

The speaker reminded people that the LTTE forcibly detained SEP members for several weeks during 1998 in the Vanni. That was a desperate attempt to block the struggle for the internationalist socialist program of the working class, which alone was capable of solving the problem of the democratic rights of oppressed people. "It was through the mobilisation of the political strength of the international working class, utilising our organ, the *World Socialist Web Site*, that we were able to secure the release of our members unharmed from the clutches of the LTTE," he said.

Dias exposed the continuation of this reactionary communal politics by the TNA, which previously functioned as the LTTE's parliamentary mouthpiece. He cited the TNA's election manifesto, which openly states its readiness to collaborate with the same forces that oppressed the Tamil people and waged a brutal war against them for nearly three decades.

The speaker quoted the TNA manifesto: "A comprehensive program for the development of the North and the East, including the creation of employment opportunities for the youth, will be undertaken with the active support of the Sri Lankan state, the Tamil Diaspora and the International Community." Dias explained that the term "international community" referred to the major global powers.

Communal clamour unavoidably went hand-in-hand with such a pro-imperialist perspective, Dias explained. This was why the TNA said that "the Sri Lankan constitutions were enacted without the consent of the Tamil people." Dias explained: "The constitutions, from the British colonial days to the present, were all adopted without the consent of both Sinhala and Tamil people. This common basis is obscured by the Sinhala and Tamil bourgeoisie alike because they both fear and oppose a unified struggle of the two communities, which raises the issue of social revolution."

SEP campaigners visited Thoppukadu village, where most of the island's people resettled after the end of the war. A woman explained that her difficulties prevented her from even thinking about the election. "The government promised to provide 500,000 rupees to build a house, but we received half of the amount ... We have to buy water from the bowser, paying 600 rupees for 1,000 litres for construction and to drink. We have to spend more than 4,000 rupees per month, just for water. We resettled in 2010 and before finishing the construction our debt rose to 350,000 rupees and the allocated money was not enough. It is a huge burden on us."

A mother said she lost her children in the war. "In the 2009 final battles, the LTTE forcibly recruited my two children, aged 18 and 20. One died in the battle and the other disappeared. The Tamil parties did nothing to find our children. They make promises in every election but fulfil nothing. Even though we did not receive anything from the TNA, most people vote for them as they represent Tamil people. I also may do so." When the SEP supporters explained that the TNA's politics represented the Tamil bourgeoisie, she commented: "You are correct. But no one explained that to us like this."

Saraswathy said her daughter was killed in the war and her son was detained for a long time in a military-run detention camp. "The Northern provincial council announced a register for the families who lost their loved ones, promising to provide help," she said. "We registered, but got no help. The government too announced it would help the former detainees, but did nothing. We live in poverty. They come to meet us only during election time, then forget us."

Nages worked in the Ceynor factory that produced fishing equipment before the war. He lost his leg in a land mine. "I have no job and live in poverty," he explained. "When I was terminated from Ceynor they paid me 200,000 rupees. That was not even enough to repair my home. I don't have money to buy socks for my leg ... After hearing your opinions I decided to vote for you this time."

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