

Sri Lankan SEP holds meeting in Jaffna on the socialist alternative to nationalism and war

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a successful public meeting at the Jaffna public library canteen on November 20. It was attended by workers, students, fishermen and housewives, including residents from the nearby islands of Kayts, Karainagar and Punguduthivu.

The meeting was chaired by Paramu Sampanthar, a leading SEP member from the Northern Province, with reports from SEP political committee members M. Thevarajah and Pani Wijesiriwardena. Speakers discussed the rising danger of imperialist war, the role of the Tamil nationalist parties and the necessity for workers to fight for a socialist and internationalist program.

Opening the event, Sampanthar explained that US President-elect Donald Trump would establish the most right-wing administration in US history and step up Washington's economic and military aggression against its international rivals. "Mankind faces the possibility of being dragged into a devastating world war," he told the meeting.

Sampanthar reviewed the political positions of the Tamil nationalist organisations and warned: "The Tamil nationalist parties, including the Tamil National Alliance [TNA], are functioning as a tool of US imperialism and support its international war drive. They held prayers in temples and churches for the victory of Hillary Clinton during the election and now express their readiness to work with Trump."

SEP political committee member M. Thevarajah pointed out that Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena had been brought to power in January last year through a US-orchestrated regime-change operation, with the full support of the TNA.

"The establishment of a pro-US government in Sri

Lanka," Thevarajah said, "was part of Washington's 'pivot to Asia,' a strategy aimed at diplomatically isolating and militarily encircling China."

Pani Wijesiriwardena began his report by pointing to the official silence of the entire political and media establishment about the real danger of a new world war.

"The purpose of this meeting is to break this silence, explain the scale of this danger and present a scientific program to prevent this possibility," the speaker. "Since the launching of the first Gulf War in 1991, we have experienced an unending 25 years of wars by the major powers. US-led imperialist interventions have decimated Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria."

The speaker told the audience that under its so-called "pivot to Asia," Washington was urging its allies—Japan, South Korea and the Philippines—to provoke China and that the US navy has on three occasions deliberately entered territorial waters claimed by Beijing in the South China Sea.

Wijesiriwardena detailed how Washington had also enlisted India as a regional frontline state against China and encouraged the Indian government to adopt a more aggressive stance against Pakistan.

"This situation has led to increased war tensions between India and Pakistan along the Kashmir border, which could trigger an all-out war between these two nuclear-armed powers. Such a war, which would see the US supporting India and China backing Pakistan, could escalate into a full-scale world war."

Wijesiriwardena explained how the TNA and other Tamil nationalist organisations were backing Washington's geo-strategic provocations.

"The very forces that the TNA appeals to for the 'protection of the democratic rights of Tamil people'—the US and other imperialist powers, who supported the

nearly three-decades long communal war against the Tamil people waged by successive Colombo governments—are now dragging mankind towards a world war,” the speaker said.

Pointing to the record of the ruling classes of the region, Wijesiriwardena said the nearly seven decades since the 1947 division of the Indian sub-continent had demonstrated that every section of the bourgeoisie, including the Tamil nationalist elite in northern Sri Lanka, is incapable of carrying out any of the basic democratic tasks confronting society.

“This confirms the central tenet of the Theory of Permanent Revolution formulated in 1905 by Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the Russian Revolution. As Trotsky explained, in countries of belated capitalist development, the capitalist class are organically incapable of resolving the most basic bourgeois democratic tasks. Those tasks can only be realised through a socialist revolution carried out by the working class.”

Wijesiriwardena warned that Trump’s election victory would not see any lessening of Washington’s aggressively militarist foreign policy. A Trump administration, he said, will put Wall Street’s demands into action, with US war plans proceeding even more intensely.

The speaker concluded by explaining that the deepening crisis of capitalism “not only creates the conditions for war but also provides the objective foundation for socialist revolution” and appealed for workers and youth to study the revolutionary program of the SEP and IYSSE.

“The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are fighting along with their international co-thinkers to rally the millions of workers worldwide, now entering into struggles, around an anti-war movement based on the perspective of socialist revolution. This was the central theme of the anti-war conference held in Detroit on November 5 by the SEP in the US. We invite all gathered in this hall to join us in building this international anti-war movement.”

SEP and IYSSE members and supporters conducted a vigorous campaign for the Jaffna meeting in the days leading up to the event. Campaigners distributed hundreds of leaflets and spoke with workers, students and residents throughout the city, including at Jaffna University and other educational institutions, work places and in the adjoining suburbs of Pasaioor, Kurunagar, Chavakachcheri and Chunnagam.

Hostile to the SEP’s anti-war program, leaders of the

Jaffna University Student Union ordered SEP campaigners to leave the university premises. When SEP supporters insisted on their democratic rights, one of the student leaders claimed that no one was allowed to conduct political campaigns on the campus. “We can’t allow any political discussion here,” he said.

The Jaffna University Student Union maintains close political ties with the TNA. Like the TNA, the student union supported the US-orchestrated regime-change operation in Sri Lanka which brought Sirisena to power.

Several university lecturers spoke with SEP campaigners and opposed the student union leaders’ anti-democratic attacks. “These so-called student leaders are openly doing the political work of the TNA at this university and blocking the fight you are taking up for working class politics,” one lecturer said. “I’m very familiar with your decades-long principled struggle against the civil war. I’ll raise this issue in the teachers’ council meeting.”

Many people voiced their concerns about the growing danger of war and discussed the SEP’s socialist program during the campaign for the Jaffna public meeting.

One shop owner said: “The TNA talks about the rights of Tamils but has close ties with the top brass of the government. They oppose the unity of ordinary Sinhalese and Tamils and at the same time maintain a dark silence about the grave danger of world war. No one, apart from you, is explaining the danger of world war. Such an event would be a disaster.”

A medical student told campaigners that it was very dangerous doing political work in Jaffna: “If we campaign against the Colombo government we have to face the repression of state forces. If we do politics against the Tamil capitalist parties we’re subjected to repression from them, and the state. I do believe, however, that we have to stop the drive towards another world war.”

Jeganathan who is from the Vanni area, which was devastated during the Sri Lankan civil war, said: “I have my own experiences of war—we had bombs raining down on us and only narrowly escaped death. I oppose this sort of disaster occurring anywhere in the world. A third world war would produce an unthinkable catastrophe.”



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