

Sri Lanka: SEP holds first local election meeting in plantation area

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) this week held its first local government election meeting at Ginigathhena, a plantation town 22 kilometres from Hatton in central district. Ginigathhena is within the Ambagamuwa Pradeshiya Sabha (council) area, which the SEP is contesting in the election scheduled for February 10.

The SEP has fielded 24 candidates for the Ambagamuwa council, headed by M. Thevarajah, a political committee member. SEP is also standing candidates for Kayts in the north and Kolonnawa near Colombo.

In the lead-up to the January 13 meeting, SEP members campaigned strongly in the area, discussing the party's socialist program with workers, farmers, housewives and youth. The campaigners distributed about 4,500 leaflets in surrounding villages, including Polpitiya and Lakshapana, and Watawala, Ginigathhena, Kenilworth, Carolina and Lonack estates.

Chairing the meeting, SEP member Palitha Athapaththu emphasised that the party would utilise the election campaign to explain the necessity of fighting for an international socialist perspective and leadership, in opposition to all the other parties. "The year 2018 marks the resurgence of class struggle internationally and in Sri Lanka," Athapaththu said. "This is also the bicentenary of Karl Marx's birth, coinciding with this working class upsurge. The socialist alternative is the only way out for workers in every country."

The first speaker, Thevarajah, explained that the growing social unrest in Sri Lanka was part of an international radicalisation of the working class. Power, port, postal and railway workers had entered strikes and protests.

Thevarajah discussed the experiences of the struggles

in the plantations. "In 2016 and 2017, hundreds of thousands of estate workers went on strikes, demanding higher wages and opposing increasing productivity.

"All the trade unions, including the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), National Union of Workers (NUW), Democratic Workers Congress (DWC) and Up-country People's Front (UPF), betrayed them. They are, in fact, imposing the plans of companies and the government on workers."

Thevarajah noted that the NUW, DWC and UPF leaders are government ministers and the CWC also sided with President Maithripala Sirisena. He concluded: "Workers need a new leadership based on a socialist program. We are campaigning for that."

The final speaker, SEP general secretary Wije Dias, began by explaining how all the capitalist parties and their pseudo-left hangers-on were using the election to divert attention from the central political issues involved in the growing class struggles erupting against the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government.

None of these parties spoke about the 200,000-strong plantation workers' strike or the struggles waged by the postal, ports, power and health and education sector workers, which expressed the widespread opposition to the government's austerity policies.

Dias said Sirisena, on the campaign trail for his party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, was going around the island speaking about his fake fight against corruption, which was the main slogan he used three years ago to highjack votes during the 2015 presidential election.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was canvassing votes for his United National Party by selling the same bundle of bogus promises he made during the 2015 general election about economic development. These two parties were jointly running the government and equally responsible for all the

corruption and broken promises.

Dias said the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was another bourgeois party, pleading for votes on the fraudulent claim that it could run “a corruption-free capitalist system.” He added: “They promise that if allowed to run the local councils they would save money and prove that councils can be run profitably.”

The Tamil National Alliance in the island’s north and the pseudo-left groups, just like the trade unions in the plantation areas, were pleading for sympathy for the government they helped bring to power.

“No one can miss how far removed these election campaigns are from the burning democratic and social issues faced by the working people and the youth,” Dias said. “Only the SEP says this election campaign must be turned into a platform to discuss a political program to replace the decadent capitalist profit system, which is the source of all the problems that masses face ...

“Capitalism on a world scale is in a state of breakdown due to its own fundamental contradictions. During the previous period of capitalist breakdown the issue posed before humanity was either the barbarism of world wars or socialist revolution. Only the revolutionary Marxist movement can give a progressive answer to this question and prepare the working class. This was proved by Lenin and Trotsky in leading the Russian workers on a socialist program, rallying the multi-million rural masses and oppressed communities, for the October 1917 revolution, which ended World War I.

“Our world party represents that revolutionary tradition. This is why SEP, as the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, fights to build a socialist anti-war movement. The only way to stop war is to overthrow capitalist rule in every country around this planet ...

“We call on all sections of the working people and youth, including those in the plantations, to build their own Action Committees to rally other oppressed people, for the establishment of a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement international socialist policies. This fight needs a revolutionary leadership and SEP is committed to build such a mass party in Sri Lanka and South Asia as part of the world party of socialist revolution.”

The speaker explained that the perspective of the

1917 revolution, to fight for world socialism, was betrayed by the Stalinist bureaucracy that later emerged in the Soviet Union.

Trotsky founded the Fourth International in 1938 to forge a new generation of revolutionaries to continue the fight. “We represent the continuity of that struggle ... This is why SEP has centred all its political work around the vital issue of stopping another global war through the fight for socialist revolution.”

After the meeting, Arunachalam, a 43-year-old salesman, told the WSWS: “This is the first meeting I have participated in, where the real problems were addressed. I have seen dozens of various parties and all of them make a list of promises but none has been implemented. Mostly, their acts when they come to power are contrary to their promises.”

A plantation worker from Hatton commented: “I saw a CWC, NUW meeting on the TV. CWC leader Arumugam Thondaman and NUW leader P. Digambaram made personal attacks. They are not concerned about workers’ problems. Both these unions are supporting the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government. Only in this election meeting have the speakers spoken about danger of world war and the problems of workers in this country and other countries.”



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