

Sri Lankan SEP holds final presidential election meeting

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a successful meeting at the Public Library auditorium in Colombo on November 11, concluding its more than month-long presidential election campaign. Pani Wijesiriwardena, a longtime member of the SEP's political committee and the Colombo editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, is the party's candidate in Saturday's election.

The SEP and IYSSE campaigned extensively in Colombo's working-class neighbourhoods, including the harbour, railway and irrigation workers' quarters, as well as amongst students and the urban poor in the lead-up to the meeting.

Chairing the event, SEP Political Committee member K. Ratnayake, noted the significance of the widespread media coverage of the SEP's presidential election campaign. He noted that although the big business media were hostile to the SEP, it could not, under conditions of increasing militancy of workers, rural poor and youth, ignore the attraction of the party's program for ordinary people.

The increasing strikes and protests by Sri Lankan workers and their brothers and sisters around the world, he said, are a powerful blow against all those who claimed that working class struggle is over and talk of socialist revolution as "a thing of the past."

Ratnayake warned that the Sri Lankan ruling elite, like its international counterparts, is turning towards autocratic forms of rule. This is indicated in the constant calls by the United National Party (UNP), Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) presidential candidates for a "disciplined country," a "strong leadership," and a "stable government." Irrespective of which candidate wins the election, the next president will quickly move

to impose the International Monetary Fund (IMF) dictated austerity measures, he said.

Prageeth Aravinda, an IYSSE leader, told the meeting that all-time youth unemployment had propelled students and youth in Sri Lanka and internationally into struggle. "The political time bomb of youth struggles," he said, "can only find a positive expression by turning to the working class for leadership."

Aravinda referred to the decision of Mahee Bandara, a former convener of the Inter University Students Federation, which is controlled by the pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), to establish *Api Seeruwen* [We are on alert] and to support Sajith Premadasa, the UNP's presidential candidate.

This development, the speaker said, is the logical outcome of the anti-working class policies of the FSP, which vehemently opposes SEP/IYSSE's fight to turn students and youth to the working class on the basis of perspective of international socialism.

Delivering the main report, Pani Wijesiriwardena said the imperialist powers were turning towards militarism, war and austerity, and intensifying their attacks on democratic rights. The speaker explained that French President Emmanuel Macron's recent statement that NATO was "brain-dead" was another indication that the European imperialist powers were organising their own military alliances in preparation for conflict, not only with Russia and China, but also with the US.

Wijesiriwardena said the ruling elites everywhere are attempting to place the full burden of the systemic crisis of capitalism on the masses but "the working class has taken the path of struggle in every country."

"Workers' demands—for higher pay and better conditions—are the same and their struggles take a common form... This expresses the potential for building the international unity of the working class."

The SEP's presidential candidate also cited recent strikes, across ethnic lines, by teachers and university non-academic workers in Sri Lanka.

Wijesiriwardena reviewed the unprecedented level of social inequality in Sri Lanka and internationally. This situation, he added, is "incompatible with democracy" and is the driving force of the escalating assaults on basic rights.

These attacks, he continued, are being spearheaded by the witch hunt of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for exposing the war crimes committed by the US and other imperialist powers. Assange and Chelsea Manning, the other prominent class war prisoner, have made "an immense contribution to the consciousness of the working class."

Wijesiriwardena explained that crisis of capitalism can only be overcome by the international working class taking political power and abolishing the nation state system and expropriating private ownership.

SEP General Secretary Wije Dias, the meeting's final speaker, further clarified the fundamental differences between the party's election campaign and that of all other candidates.

The SEP bases itself on the strategic lessons of the Marxist movement over a whole epoch and the fight for the political independence of the international working class against all sections of the bourgeoisie, Dias said.

The speaker reviewed the political lessons of the Russian Revolution, the struggle against Stalinism, Leon Trotsky's fight to establish the Fourth International and resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership and the fight by the International Committee of the Fourth International against Pabloite opportunism.

"All the fake-left political parties that bogusly claim to be fighting for socialism," he said, "refuse to learn the invaluable lessons of these historical struggles, and will invariably end up in the camp of reaction..."

These "left" parties separate the socialist program into two parts—the immediate and long term—and insist that to fight for the overthrow of the capitalist rule "prevents the mobilisation of the working class."

All their campaigns, including elections, are limited to raising what they claim are "immediate issues," Dias said. "This is the path of grotesque opportunism and class compromise.

"Contrary to the false speculation of these fake lefts,"

Dias said, "the SEP has experienced wide-ranging support among the workers, rural poor and youth of all communities—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—in all parts of the island in this election campaign.

"Our intervention has raised the stature of SEP to a new level and gives us confidence that we will transform the SEP into a mass revolutionary party in the coming period. We must intensify the task of politically educating workers and youth in Sri Lanka and South Asia, through building the readership of the *World Socialist Web Site*," Dias concluded.



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