

SEP (Sri Lanka) holds open-air election meeting in Jaffna district

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka, together with the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), held an open-air meeting at Oori village in Karainagar on February 19. About 60 people, including fishermen, farmers, daily wage workers, youth and housewives, along with SEP members and supporters attended the event.

In addition to running 13 candidates for the Karainagar Pradeshiya Sabha, the SEP is also fielding candidates at two other local government bodies—the Kolonnawa urban council in Colombo and the Maskeliya Pradeshiya Sabha in Nuwaraeliya.

Karainagar island is connected by a causeway to the Jaffna Peninsula in the Northern province, which was heavily damaged during the 26-year communalist war waged by successive Colombo governments against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Prior to the meeting, the SEP/IYSSE members and supporters campaigned among workers, farmers, youth and fishermen in Karainagar and beyond, explaining the SEP's call for workers and rural poor to build their own independent action committees at their workplaces, factories and neighbourhoods to fight for their democratic and social rights.

Thousands of copies of the SEP's election announcement were distributed by campaigners who also explained the importance of the International Committee of the Fourth International's fight for an international anti-war movement of workers and youth against the growing danger of world war. The campaign attracted significant support among workers, students and youth with thousands of rupees donated to the SEP election fund by Oori villagers.

Addressing the meeting, SEP Political Committee and local government election candidate Paramu Thirugnanasampanthar explained how the Tamil

bourgeois parties had propped up President Wickremesinghe's oppressive government.

"All the Tamil parties, including Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchchi (Democratic), the Tamil National Alliance, the Tamil National People's Front and Tamil Makkal Koodani, are working as agents of the imperialist powers," he explained. "As the US is preparing war against the China with the support of India, the Tamil parties are backing these moves, expecting in return, Washington's support for a power-sharing arrangement with Colombo."

The speaker told the meeting that the Tamil bourgeois parties "are exploiting the problems faced by the war-affected Tamil workers, youth and rural people to promote their pro-imperialist politics. They are standing against the class unity of the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers."

SEP Political Committee member Mahalingam Dilaxshan, who chaired the meeting, briefly explained the Trotskyist foundations of the SEP as the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. "We are fighting to overthrow the outmoded capitalist system and build a socialist society," he said.

IYSSE member and local government candidate Muruganandan Suthan reviewed the grave issues confronting youth. Young people, he said, face rising unemployment in Sri Lanka.

"In the Northern province, which was horribly affected by the war, youth face very bad conditions. They confront unemployment, dropping out early from school education and the dangers of addiction to narcotics," Suthan said. He invited youth to join the IYSSE and SEP to fight for socialism to counter this devastation.

Long-standing SEP member Rajaratnam Balagowry

explained the grave economic situation in Sri Lanka. “We are facing an international economic crisis that has been intensified by the pandemic and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine,” she said. She stressed the need for the development of a unified international movement of the working class based on an socialist perspective and anti-war war program.

SEP Political Committee member Dinesh Heymaal pointed to harsh social issues confronting Karainagar residents.

Referring to Colombo’s decades-long communal war against the LTTE, he said: “Even though the war ended more than 13 years ago, successive governments have failed to resolve the basic problems confronting the people. Many are still living in unsuitable homes and many youth are unemployed. People also face drinking water problems and are compelled to buy water from the private tankers.

“Fishermen and farmers confront the skyrocketing cost of kerosene [which is essential for their work]. The capitalist rulers are now destroying social welfare which was won in past struggles by the working class.”

SEP assistant secretary Saman Gunadasa delivered the main speech to the open-air event. He began by pointing out that President Wickremesinghe’s sabotage of the local government elections was unprecedented.

“The government is worried that it faces a humiliating election defeat because of the hardships it is imposing on the masses that could escalate political instability and scuttle the IMF-dictated austerity program,” he said.

Gunadasa referred to Wickremesinghe’s speech the previous day to a Colombo Rotary Club event where he vowed to maintain “law and order” and prevent “anarchy,” declaring that his priority was “economic recovery.”

Gunadasa said this was a direct threat to the working class, youth and rural masses and indicated that his government is prepared to attack fundamental democratic rights. Wickremesinghe’s concern about economic recovery “is not about the suffering of working masses,” the speaker continued, “but implementation of the brutal austerity measures dictated by the IMF. Wickremesinghe and the ruling elite have learnt from last year’s mass uprising which chased Gotabhaya Rajapakse out of the country and the presidency. They are trying to prevent this sort of mass

movement occurring again.”

“How will the working class confront these threats?” Gunadasa asked.

“The SEP was the only political party which fought during last year’s mass uprising to provide the working class with the revolutionary program needed to fight for their basic social and democratic demands. The opposition parties, trade unions, pseudo-left parties and middle-class civil society organisations promoted an all-party government. This paved the way for Wickremesinghe to become president. They forcibly blocked a revolutionary program under the banner of ‘no politics.’

“The SEP urged workers to set up their own independent action committees at workplaces, to take matters to their own hands and proposed the establishment of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses as a power centre for the working class. This is the program the SEP is taking forward in this election campaign.

“The ongoing war against Russia by the US and NATO, using Ukraine,” Gunadasa stressed “is threatening humanity with nuclear conflagration. The goal of the imperialists is preservation of their global hegemony over everything. Their plan is to loot Russia but their main target is China.”

The speaker explained that the international working class was the only force that could stop imperialist war. He pointed out that the capitalist ruling elites had no concerns about the loss of lives, referring to the millions killed by COVID-19 and the tens of thousands killed in the earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

He called on workers and youth to join the SEP and take up its fight for workers’ and peasants’ government to overthrow capitalism and to implement socialist policies. “This program will repudiate the debts of successive capitalist governments. The working class will take control of production and distribution, seize the resources and wealth of the ruling elite, and distribute it on the basis of social needs,” he concluded.



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