

SEP (Sri Lanka) holds powerful meeting to conclude its presidential election campaign

Our correspondents
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On Wednesday, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a well-attended meeting at the Public Library Auditorium in Colombo to conclude the party's presidential election intervention. The election is scheduled to be held on Saturday.

Following the launch of its campaign with a public meeting at the same venue on August 16, the SEP held a dozen meetings in different parts of the country to initiate the political discussion on the party's revolutionary socialist and internationalist perspective. Teams of SEP members and supporters campaigned among workers, youth and the rural poor in different cities and provinces across the island, distributing thousands of copies of the party's election statement in Sinhala and Tamil.

A key feature of Wednesday's public meeting was an address by SEP (US) presidential candidate Joe Kishore who spoke via an online link. Attendees were provided with Sinhala- or Tamil-language translations of his speech. Kishore's remarks were followed by a presentation from Pani Wijesiriwardana, the SEP's presidential candidate. Over 100 people, including party members, supporters and contacts met across the island during the campaign, attended the meeting, which was also streamed through the SEP's Facebook page.

SEP General Secretary Deepal Jayasekera chaired the meeting, telling the audience: "The SEP is clearly warning the working class, the youth and the rural poor that whoever wins this Saturday's presidential election will trash their various promises and brutally implement the harsh austerity program dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This will further push the vast majority of workers and the oppressed into abject poverty."

Jayasekera said that the main theme of the SEP's campaign was the necessity for an international socialist program and perspective against imperialist war, the

vicious austerity program of the ruling capitalist class and its preparation for dictatorial forms of rule.

"Contrary to all other parties and candidates, our party is the only one telling the truth: that the burning issues confronting the working class and oppressed masses—deepening poverty, unemployment and other social problems—cannot be solved on a national basis, or within this capitalist profit system. The only solution is through a struggle for a revolutionary socialist internationalist program to overthrow capitalist rule on a global scale and bring the working class to power," Jayasekera said.

Addressing the meeting, SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris explained the reactionary role of the fake left during the election. Referring to the Frontline Socialist Party and the United Socialist Party, she said: "Both these parties promote the fraud that reforms are possible within the capitalist system, when what is really on the agenda is austerity and dictatorship. In practice, they reject the fight for socialism, consigning it to a distant future."

Peiris spoke about the growing danger of a Third World War, including the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and Washington's preparations for a catastrophic conflict against China. Every other party was suppressing discussion of the military threat, she noted, in line with their bankrupt nationalist and ultimately pro-war programs.

IYSSE representative and SEP Political Committee member Sakuntha Hirimuthugoda spoke about the government's IMF-dictated attacks on free education. He told the meeting that the education policies formulated by all the bourgeois parties justified the privatisation of education, further restricting the access of the masses to this fundamental social right.

Hirimuthugoda referred to brutal police attacks on

protesting students last week and warned that these assaults made clear how the next government would respond to the demands and struggles of workers and students. “To defend free education students must rally around the working class and fight for socialism,” he said.

Speaking remotely, SEP (US) presidential candidate Joe Kishore began by referring to the escalating threat of global war. He explained: “The emergence of the class struggle is the essential foundation for addressing all the problems that we confront. It is the basis for opposing imperialist war and stopping the mad drive to World War III. It is the only way that the far-right can be undermined, and its fascistic demagoguery exposed. It is the necessary means through which the stranglehold of the oligarchs over all social and economic life can be countered and overturned.”

Kishore referred to the latest political developments in the US: “Bourgeois democracy in America is on its last legs. One of the principal parties of the ruling class, the Republican Party, has acquired an increasingly overt fascistic character, headed by former President Donald Trump, who less than four years ago instigated a coup aimed at overturning the presidential election result and the entire constitutional order.

“There is enormous discontent in the working class. Workers here confront, in essence, the same issues that workers confront in Sri Lanka and every country. The US is the most socially unequal of all the advanced capitalist countries. Everything is subordinated to the interests of the capitalist oligarchy. Masses of people are unable to afford to live. The health care system is falling apart. The education system is in shambles. Corporations are engaged in a wave of mass layoffs.”

“The development of the class struggle, however, depends above all on the building of a political leadership, a socialist and revolutionary leadership. There is no other way. There are no shortcuts or easy answers,” Kishore emphasised.

Delivering the final presentation, Pani Wijesiriwardena rejected the claims of several presidential candidates who insist that the sole reason for the capitalist crisis in Sri Lanka is fraud and corruption.

“The ruling class in every country is moving towards dictatorial forms of rule to suppress the growing resistance of the working class. War, austerity and dictatorship flow from the same root, and that root is the deepest crisis of the global capitalist system.

“This collapse was heralded by the financial crash of 2008, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic

and a two-front war waged by the imperialists. Sri Lanka’s crisis is one of the sharpest manifestations of this global crisis,” he told the meeting.

Wijesiriwardena explained that all the bourgeois contenders for the presidency are promoting the harsh austerity program of the IMF. He also denounced the efforts of the political parties based in the hill country plantation districts and the unions to divide Tamil-speaking plantation workers from their class brothers and sisters across the island by claiming that plantation workers are a distinct community. Wijesiriwardena explained the SEP’s determined fight against the communalism of the bourgeoisie and the party’s principled fight for the unity of the working class on socialist policies.

The speaker referred to the short-term strategy of the fake-left Frontline Socialist Party and its orientation to the bourgeoisie and parliament: “They present socialism as a long-term program and push it into the distant future. That means they will never prepare the working class to overthrow the capitalist system. This is the two-stage theory of revolution originally developed by the Soviet Stalinists. By contrast, the SEP is fighting to independently mobilise the working class and bring it to power by overthrowing bourgeois rule. That is the path to socialism.”

Wijesiriwardena outlined the SEP’s campaign for the building of a Socialist and Democratic Congress of Workers and Rural Masses. It would be made up of delegates from worker-controlled action committees in the factories, workplaces and neighbourhoods, and in the plantations and the rural areas, independent of all the bourgeois parties and the union bureaucracies. The purpose of such a congress is to create the conditions for bringing a workers’ and peasants’ government to power as part of the fight for international socialism.



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