

SEP (Sri Lanka) holds local government election campaign meeting in Jaffna

Our reporters
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As part of its campaign for the May 6 local government elections in Sri Lanka, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), together with the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), held a public meeting in Jaffna. Another has taken place in Colombo.

The SEP is contesting the elections for the Karainagar Divisional Council in the war-torn north, and the Kolonnawa Urban Council near Colombo, fielding 12 and 21 candidates respectively.

Both meetings were live-streamed on the SEP's Facebook page. As of yesterday, the videos had received more than 8,000 views. A brief report on the Jaffna meeting was aired by DAN TV in its news bulletin. The SEP also held press conferences in both Jaffna and Colombo, which were attended by a significant number of journalists from the print and electronic media.

The well-attended meeting in Jaffna on April 7 took place at the YMCA Auditorium. It was chaired by Diluxan Mahalingam, an SEP Political Committee member and one of the party's candidates for the Karainagar Divisional Council.

Drawing on the SEP's March 25 election statement, Mahalingam outlined the party's program. He explained that the worsening social conditions in Sri Lanka are part of the global crisis of capitalism, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the US-led NATO war in Ukraine against Russia.

Mahalingam stressed the need for working people—Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim alike—to respond to the crisis as a united class, independently mobilising their political strength under a socialist and internationalist perspective.

“Local council elections were undemocratically postponed by former presidents Gotabhaya Rajapakse and Ranil Wickremesinghe. The newly elected Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) regime is now holding these elections not to strengthen

democracy, but to strengthen its hand in imposing the International Monetary Fund's austerity measures. The JVP/NPP has taken the baton directly from Wickremesinghe to enforce these policies, with Dissanayake's budget for this year based on the IMF's demands,” Mahalingam said.

M. Anita, a leading member of the IYSSE, addressed the severe education crisis in the Jaffna district. Citing official data, she noted a dramatic drop in school enrolments across the district, falling by over 180,000 students between 2020 and 2023.

Anita told the meeting that official reports indicated malnutrition and economic hardship were forcing children out of the classroom and into exploitative work.

She emphasised the necessity of fighting for socialist policies to defend and improve free public education. “Building IYSSE branches in schools, universities, and among young workers is necessary to fight for this program,” she said.

Thirugnana Sampanthar, the SEP's lead candidate for Karainagar and Political Committee member, exposed the treacherous role of Tamil nationalist parties.

“Mass opposition to these parties was demonstrated in the November election [last year]. Votes for the oldest Tamil bourgeois party, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), dropped to 257,813 in November last year, compared to 327,168 in the August 2020 general election. Similarly, its parliamentary seats fell from 10 to 8,” he said.

Sampanthar told the meeting that these parties were primarily engaged in wheeling and dealing with successive Colombo governments to secure privileges for the Tamil elite in the North and East. Their supposed concern for the Tamil masses—who were severely affected by the 26-year-long communal war—was disingenuous, he argued.

He explained that the Tamil nationalist parties

supported IMF-dictated austerity policies under both past and current Sri Lankan governments.

“These parties are united in defending the interests of Sri Lanka’s capitalist system. That’s why the JVP/NPP was able to exploit mass opposition to the traditional Tamil parties in the last election and make significant gains.

“To deceive Tamil voters, President Dissanayake has claimed he will release Tamil political prisoners and repeal the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). But the government now insists there are no political prisoners—only criminals involved in terrorist acts. The PTA will remain in use until a similar law is introduced,” he said.

Sampanthar condemned the ongoing military occupation of the North and East and the military’s continued possession of land owned by Tamil people. He reaffirmed the SEP’s demand for the immediate withdrawal of Sri Lankan troops.

“The democratic rights of the Tamil people can only be achieved through the overthrow of capitalism and the fight for socialism,” he emphasised.

The final speaker at the Jaffna meeting was SEP Assistant Secretary Saman Gunadasa. He said the JVP/NPP was functioning as a direct tool of global finance capital, intensifying the IMF’s austerity program through tax hikes, subsidy cuts, increased utility charges, and privatisation.

The government’s so-called “anti-corruption” rhetoric was a smokescreen, he argued, while it continued to enrich big business and international creditors. “The root of corruption lies in the capitalist system itself, which the JVP/NPP defends,” Gunadasa said.

He explained how the global capitalist crisis—marked by contradictions between globalised production and the outmoded nation-state system—had led to the rise of authoritarianism and war, as seen in the US under President Donald Trump.

Gunadasa drew parallels between Trump’s actions and the rise of Hitler, warning that ruling classes everywhere were turning toward fascism and dictatorship.

“Trump has launched a tariff war against the world, which is escalating into a trade war and could lead to global conflict. This tariff war mainly targets China, with a staggering 145 percent tariff imposed.

“In Sri Lanka, the Dissanayake government has been shaken by the recent 44 percent tariff increase. Although it’s been temporarily suspended, the government is

nervous because it could trigger further economic turmoil. The ruling elite fears mass unrest,” he said.

Gunadasa highlighted the ongoing suppression of democratic rights in Sri Lanka. In December, police attacked demonstrations by School Development Officers, and in a major blow to freedom of expression, the government banned an IYSSE meeting at Peradeniya University titled “How to Fight Against IMF Austerity.”

Striking health workers were warned against making “unreasonable” demands, and police recently cracked down on a protest by unemployed allied health graduates.

Gunadasa stressed the urgent need to build a network of independent workers’ action committees in every workplace and neighborhood to fight the IMF’s austerity agenda and defend democratic rights. These committees, he said, must be free from the control of union bureaucracies and capitalist parties.

“The SEP has advanced a socialist program aimed at mobilising the working class against austerity, to nationalise major enterprises and banks and place them under workers’ control.

“Foreign debts must be repudiated. It is necessary to reorganise production to meet human needs, as part of a struggle for international socialism. We follow the example of the Russian Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky.

“To fight for this perspective, the SEP is campaigning to build a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses, based on delegates from action committees.

“Against the capitalist class’s strategy, working people must advance their own. This must be the fight for a Sri Lankan and Eelam Socialist Republic, as part of a Federation of South Asian Socialist Republics and the world socialist revolution.”



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