

Sri Lankan prime minister's false election promises in Karainagar

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Sri Lankan Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya addressed a meeting held in Karainagar on April 11 to support Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People Power (JVP/NPP) candidates in the May 6 local government elections.

Desperate for a big win in the local elections, Amarasuriya appealed to voters for support claiming that the JVP/NPP is committed to uplifting the living conditions of the rural poor in Karainagar and elsewhere.

Six months after winning the presidential election in September and the parliamentary elections in November, the JVP/NPP has been exposed as a tool of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and big business, breaking all its promises to improve living conditions and defend the democratic rights of the masses.

As a candidate of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Karainagar, I warn workers, the poor and youth not to believe the latest false JVP/NPP promises. What Amarasuriya stated in the meeting are lies and a blatant cover-up.

The SEP is contesting the Karainagar Divisional Council in the North and Kolonnawa Urban Council near Colombo seeking to mobilise the working class on a socialist and internationalist program as outlined in the SEP election statement.

Karainagar is one of the small islands surrounding the predominantly-Tamil Jaffna Peninsula. Like other areas of the northern and eastern provinces, it was devastated by the 26-year long brutal communal war, which began in 1983, against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

In the November parliamentary election, the JVP/NPP won the Vaddukoddai seat which includes Karainagar, defeating the long-standing Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi and All Ceylon Tamil Congress. It was able to exploit anger among the Tamil masses against these discredited traditional bourgeois parties.

At the outset of the speech, Amarasuriya expressed her dismay over drastic depletion of the local population over the past four decades from around 80,000 in 1970s to 10,500.

She claimed this had happened because people had to leave Karainagar “in order to be educated, become very wealthy and such like.” What about the people who could not leave, she declared, “Are they not citizens of this country?”

To imply that the tens of thousands no longer in the district are all among the educated, wealthy elite in Sri Lanka and overseas is an absurdity. It covers up the terrible tragedies that occurred during the communal war that only ended in 2009 and is still fresh in the minds of many people.

During the war, many people were killed and injured. Houses were bombed and completely destroyed. Some people were simply ‘disappeared’ at the hands of military-aligned death squads. Those who could, fled the country from one refugee camp to another, mostly ending up in menial poorly paid work.

Amarasuriya barely referred to the communal conflict. She used the word “war” just three times in her speech simply to say that nothing had changed after it ended. She said nothing about the war itself and why it was provoked.

The prime minister has never opposed the 26-year communal war, even after she took to politics from 2011 as a university academic. Her empty phrases about opposing “violence” and supporting “reconciliation,” are so many hypocritical words used to hoodwink the masses.

What is behind this cover-up? She was prominent in helping President Dissanayake to organise the NPP in 2019 as a front organisation for the JVP to hide its criminal past.

The JVP, which is deeply mired in Sinhala chauvinism, was an ardent supporter of the war from its inception. Its only criticism of successive Colombo regimes was that they were not aggressive enough in conducting military operations.

The entire Colombo political establishment, and the JVP hailed military victory over the LTTE in May 2009, which saw the slaughter of at least 40,000 civilians and the disappearance of thousands according to UN estimates, and the detention of 300,000 civilians in military-controlled camps for months. Moreover, the JVP has repeatedly defended the military's war crimes and atrocities.

Anyone who tours Karainagar can still see where houses were razed to ground. If you talk to an old person, he or she would explain the death, destruction and misery through which they suffered. Amarasuriya wants people to forget the past.

The coastal areas of Karainagar were occupied by the Sri Lankan navy and controlled as high security zones for decades. The Cey-Nor fishing boat factory was destroyed and a major naval base was established there.

In 1987, under the Indo-Lanka Accord, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) occupied the north and east of Sri Lanka including Karainagar. The so-called peace-keeping troops continued the brutal repression, massacring thousands, as they sought to disarm the LTTE and suppress any opposition.

The JVP opposed the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord, not from the standpoint of defending the working class, but “defending the

nation.” It declared that the presence of Indian troops and the limited devolution of powers to the Tamil elite was a betrayal of the nation and launched a vicious anti-Indian chauvinist campaign.

It is a matter of historical record that the JVP launched fascistic attacks in the south killing thousands of political opponents, trade unionists, workers and youth demanding that they join their protests and strikes.

Three comrades of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), predecessor of the SEP, were killed by JVP gunmen. The RCL opposed the Indo-Lankan Accord not from the standpoint of defending the nation, but of uniting workers—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—on a socialist perspective to demand an immediate end to the conflict and the withdrawal of all troops from the North and the East.

Only the RCL/SEP opposed the war from the outset, explaining it was the continuation of the anti-Tamil discrimination pursued by successive Colombo governments since formal independence in 1948. The conflict began with the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom and was waged on the basis of Sinhala supremacism aimed at dividing the working class and bolstering bourgeois rule.

We also opposed the nationalist politics of the Tamil bourgeois parties, including separatism of the LTTE. These parties were and are not concerned with the democratic rights of Tamil people, but only with the privileges of Tamil elite.

The LTTE and all these parties appealed to imperialism for support in carving out a separate capitalist state-let with the devolution of wide powers for the North and East in order to jointly exploit workers and the rural poor.

The RCL/SEP called for the unity of the working class to fight for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic as part of a Federation of Socialist Republics of South Asia and internationally.

Amarasuriya sobbed about the pathetic living conditions facing people in Karainagar highlighting the lack of educational facilities, the problem of getting clean water and the neglected roads and transport.

Coming to the point of her election campaign, Amarasuriya said: “This is where local government becomes so critically important. A budget was passed about a month ago. Money was allocated to fulfill all these needs in the country. Every single cent must be spent wisely. You must elect clean, incorruptible people.”

What she really meant was vote for the JVP/NPP!

What about the budget the prime minister praised as a panacea for all ills? It is nothing but a blueprint prepared under IMF supervision for greater austerity and more burdens heaped on working people. The IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva wholeheartedly praised the budget and messaged Dissanayake, “Mr. President, Bravo! My Heart is With You!”

The government’s real class interests came to the fore when Amarasuriya outlined its two main priorities. “First was to get this economy on the right track,” she said. Suffering people must have some relief and the economy be corrected given its bad management and heavy corruption and but added, “We must be very disciplined with our economy, not to spend too much.”

What does “being on the right track” and “not spending too much” mean? It means following the IMF’s dictates and forcing

working people to tighten their belts even further. Dissanayake has only extended the austerity measures of his pro-IMF predecessor, Ranil Wickremesinghe, who massively increased taxes, utility prices and the cost of all essentials to repay international loan sharks and boost big-business profits.

The second priority, Amarasuriya declared, was the “restoration of democracy in this country.” Her only evidence was the holding of two elections within six months. These were not held for the JVP/NPP’s love for democracy but to strengthen its hands to push through IMF austerity.

During the presidential and parliamentary election campaigns, Dissanayake declared the JVP/NPP would repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), Online Security Act (OSA) that gags freedom of expression, release Tamil political prisoners and return all land under military occupation in the North and East to their original owners.

The opposite is taking place. The government is using the PTA to detain youth. Senior military generals are using the OSA against social media activists. Ministers have backtracked on the promise to release political prisoners, saying there were persons convicted of various terrorist activities who cannot be released immediately. The oppressive military occupation of the North and East continues.

In December, police violently suppressed a protest by School Development Officers. Police violence is continuing against student protests. Workers coming to struggle have been menacingly warned not to sabotage the government’s efforts for economic recovery.

Above all, in a blatantly anti-democratic move, Peradeniya University authorities banned the meeting organised by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), to be held on January 3, at the government’s instigation. The authorities declared the meeting “How to fight against the IMF austerity?” was challenging government policy.

Far from defending democracy, this brief record demonstrates that the JVP/NPP are trampling on basic democratic rights. In fact, the government is rapidly moving towards dictatorial rule amid rising opposition to its austerity program.

The SEP has intervened in this election on a socialist program to unite the working class across ethnic lines and to mobilise it independently of all capitalist parties. There is no solution within the capitalist system or within the national framework.

We urge workers and youth to study our program and join the SEP to build it as the revolutionary party to politically lead this struggle. Vote for SEP candidates in Karainagar and Kolonnawa to register your support for this program.



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