SEP/IYSSE public meeting in Sri Lanka discusses socialist strategy against JVP/NPP government

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its youth and student organisation, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka, held a well-attended public meeting on November 10 at the Public Library auditorium in Colombo to discuss the lessons of the first two years of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government. About 100 party members, supporters, workers and youth attended the meeting, which was also livestreamed on Facebook.

During the preceding month, SEP and IYSSE members campaigned at workplaces, working-class neighbourhoods and universities, discussing the government's record and the deepening opposition among ordinary people.

The meeting was chaired by SEP Political Committee member Pani Wijesiriwardena, who examined the political circumstances that brought the JVP/NPP to power. He explained how trade unions and pseudo-left organisations, including the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), betrayed the 2022 mass uprising that ousted President Gotabaya Rajapakse by diverting the movement into parliamentary channels. The JVP/NPP subsequently won the 2024 elections with the backing of substantial sections of the ruling class and imperialist powers, including the US.

SEP General Secretary Deepal Jayasekera, delivering the main speech, recalled the warnings made by the SEP and *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) that the JVP/NPP government would defend the interests of the ruling class in Sri Lanka and align with US imperialism and its allies against working people.

Jayasekera explained that the JVP/NPP government had carried out the opposite of its election promises to alleviate the tremendous economic burdens facing ordinary people.

"This government is fully committed to the demands of the IMF, international finance capital, the Sri Lankan ruling elite and imperialist powers. At the same time, it has strengthened the bourgeois state apparatus while launching police-state repression to suppress growing opposition from workers, youth and the rural poor against the savage austerity program that it is carrying forward," Jayasekera said.

He pointed out how the main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and the JVP/NPP, with the assistance of trade union bureaucracies and pseudo-left organisations like the FSP, derailed the popular uprising of 2022, which was triggered by austerity, soaring prices and shortages of basic goods. These organisations promoted a parliamentary solution, paving the way for notorious IMF enforcer Ranil Wickremesinghe to come to power, followed by the JVP/NPP.

During the 2024 election campaign, Dissanayake and other JVP/NPP leaders spoke from both sides of their mouths. While promising at public meetings to renegotiate the IMF austerity agreement and abolish repressive laws, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), they assured big business that "IMF austerity would be implemented to the letter" and that a JVP/NPP administration would fully serve their interests, Jayasekera said.

Having come to office, the JVP/NPP discarded its promises to working people. Salary increases for public sector workers in the government's two budgets have failed to compensate for the sharp decline in real wages since 2022. Taxes imposed on working people by the Wickremesinghe government remain in place.

"This is the real meaning of the government's economic 'recovery.' It is a recovery for the bourgeoisie, global creditors and the wealthy. Workers and the poor experience declining real wages, price increases, increased taxes and deepening poverty," Jayasekera explained.

The government is implementing IMF demands to privatise and restructure more than 400 state-owned enterprises, threatening hundreds of thousands of public-sector jobs. It recently announced plans to close 34 state institutions under the pretext of cutting "unnecessary expenditure" while transferring public infrastructure and

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services to private investors.

The SEP opposes privatisation and calls for state-owned enterprises to be placed under the democratic control of the working class to meet social needs rather than private profit. “This can only be done under a workers’ and peasants’ government dedicated to a socialist program. The SEP/IYSSE fights for this program,” the speaker outlined.

Jayasekera highlighted the hardships facing youth, including unemployment, underemployment, rising education costs, deteriorating university facilities, dangerous jobs and poverty wages. He stressed that education, healthcare, jobs, housing and other basic necessities are social rights, not commodities subordinated to corporate profits and IMF demands.

Despite promising to abolish repressive laws, the JVP/NPP government continues to use the PTA and other draconian laws against workers, youth, students and the poor. It is now seeking to introduce two further repressive measures, the Protection of the State from Terrorism Act (PSTA) and the Prevention of Organised Crime Bill (POCB), which retain almost all the draconian provisions of the PTA and go beyond them in some respects. Jayasekera warned that these measures are intended to criminalise opposition to government policies, intimidate strikes and other working-class actions, and suppress opposition to the government’s austerity program.

The speaker exposed the role of trade union bureaucracies, including those controlled by the JVP, in suppressing working-class opposition to IMF austerity. He cited how, in early 2025, health-sector unions limited the opposition of health workers to cuts in their allowances to a one-day strike, and how union leaders ended a week-long postal workers’ strike as the government deployed the military and police. He stressed that workers cannot rely on the union apparatus, which is “tied hand and foot to defending the bourgeois state, ruling-class parties and the IMF.”

Jayasekera warned that opposition parties, including the SJB, defend the same IMF austerity program in the interests of the ruling class. He also exposed the FSP’s role in politically defending the JVP/NPP. The FSP initially hailed the JVP/NPP’s rise as “an expression of popular expectations.” It later criticised the government for carrying out Wickremesinghe’s program. Yet the FSP still defends the JVP/NPP as a “progressive alternative” to the traditional parties and claims that it can be pressured to “correct its line”.

Exposing the fraudulent character of the FSP’s criticism of the JVP/NPP government’s new repressive laws, Jayasekera pointed out that FSP leaders argued that existing laws—essential service orders, emergency regulations and other repressive laws—were sufficient to suppress “terrorism” and “crimes.” “This reveals the FSP’s defence of the existing state apparatus against workers and the poor,” he said.

Jayasekera called on workers to reject the trade union bureaucracies and pseudo-left organisations and establish their own independent action committees in workplaces, factories, plantation estates and neighbourhoods, excluding union bureaucrats and bourgeois parties. He also called for the rural poor and peasants to establish independent committees. The SEP proposes to build a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and the Rural Poor, based on democratically elected representatives of these committees, to discuss the necessary socialist program.

He underscored that workers in Sri Lanka faced the same conditions as workers internationally, and “should unite with workers in other countries who are engaged in struggles against imperialist war, austerity policies, dictatorial plans and capitalist exploitation. Workers should coordinate their struggles with those of their international class brothers and sisters through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), initiated by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Workers have to organise across racial, religious and other divisions and national borders. The SEP in Sri Lanka and its sister parties of the ICFI are fighting for this program.”

He concluded by saying that “the SEP and IYSSE call on workers, youth, students and the rural poor to join the fight for this program and to build the SEP as the mass working-class socialist party necessary to lead this struggle.”

Following Jayasekera’s speech, Wijesiriwardena presented the resolution adopted at the SEP’s fourth national congress supporting the international campaign for the release of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Jayasekera spoke about the ICFI’s international campaign to free Bogdan and called for maximum support.

The meeting was followed by discussion in which participants praised its Marxist analysis and stressed the need to bring the SEP’s program to a wider audience.



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