

SEP (Sri Lanka) holds public meeting to launch presidential election campaign

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality in Sri Lanka held a powerful meeting to launch SEP's presidential election campaign on Friday, August 16 at the Public Library Auditorium in Colombo. About 60 people, including party members and supporters, attended the event.

This was the first of several meetings organised by the SEP throughout the country including in the Southern and Northern provinces. The Sri Lankan presidential election is scheduled for Saturday, September 21.

Deepal Jayasekera, the SEP general secretary chaired the meeting. Introducing Wijesiriwardena, he said that the SEP candidate had about a 50-year record of fighting for the party's Trotskyist principles of international socialism among workers and youth.

Explaining the purpose of the SEP's intervention into the election, Jayasekera said that the party was campaigning to broaden the independent political mobilisation of the working class on a socialist perspective against imperialist war and the turn by the ruling class to austerity and dictatorial forms of rule.

"The SEP is the only party in the election that tells truth to the workers and oppressed masses contrary to all parties of the political establishment and their trade union and pseudo-left agencies," he said. "None of the burning issues facing the masses, including deepening poverty, unemployment and other social problems can be solved within the capitalist profit system or on a national basis. What is required is a struggle for an international socialist program and perspective to bring the working class to power and overthrow bourgeois rule globally."

SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris told the meeting that the SEP was fighting to mobilise and

guide the working class on a global strategy of abolishing capitalism and replacing it with socialism.

"The same contradictions of capitalism that drive the ruling class to war and destruction, also drive the working class toward social revolution," she said. "But the working class cannot spontaneously achieve the necessary consciousness. There has to be a revolutionary party to provide the necessary perspective and leadership to the working class. In the election campaign, we are deepening our struggle to build the SEP as the mass revolutionary party of the working class."

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) convenor Kapila Fernando drew attention to the bloody record of the ruling class towards the country's youth. He pointed to the massacre of tens of thousands of Sinhala youth in 1971 and again in 1988-90 to suppress rural unrest in the South, then of Tamil youth during the communal war by successive governments against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Fernando explained that successive governments had slashed essential public services like free education and healthcare won in struggles of the working class during 1940s under the leadership then Trotskyist Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI). He said that successive attacks on workers and youth demonstrated in the negative the correctness of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution. "The bourgeoisie in backward countries are utterly incapable of securing basic social and democratic rights of the working people. Only the working class rallying around it the poor peasantry and fighting for socialism is able to achieve these rights," Fernando said.

Delivering the main speech, SEP presidential candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena pointed out the main

differences between the campaigns of the SEP and other candidates. “The SEP does not have a separate election program. During our election campaign, we present the working people the international socialist program and perspective of our world party, International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).”

Wijesiriwardena said that the SEP was the only party warning of the growing danger of world war by the US and other imperialist powers. None of the other candidates even raise this issue before the masses. He explained that the intensifying assault on social and democratic rights of working people flowed from the global crisis of capitalism.

“After handing in their nominations, all the bourgeois candidates talk about building up the ‘country.’ What does this country consist of? There are two major classes in the country: the bourgeoisie and the working class. They all mean propping up profits of the bourgeoisie in expense of the working class,” he said. In opposition to all of them, the SEP is fighting for the interests of the working class.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe claims to be resolving the country’s problems, Wijesiriwardena said, but the latest statistics show that the poverty rate in Sri Lanka has skyrocketed from 11 percent in 2019 to 26 percent in 2024. The top 1 percent of the population now owns 31 percent of the country’s wealth while bottom 50 percent owns less than 4 percent. “These figures show which class Wickremesinghe is resolving problems for.”

The speaker drew the political lessons of the mass uprising in 2022 in which millions of workers, youth and rural masses joined strikes and protests all over the country, demanding the ouster of president Gotabhaya Rajapakse. Rajapakse was forced to flee the country and resign. But trade union bureaucracies and fake lefts such as the Frontline Socialist Party (SEP) worked to block an independent political movement of the working class by channeling the mass movement into “interim government” trap promoted by the opposition parties—the Samagi Jana Balawegaya and JVP. This paved the way for the installation of Wickremesinghe, who has implemented the harsh austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Wijesiriwardena explained that during 2022 the SEP

fought among struggling workers, youths and rural poor for an alternative revolutionary socialist program. Against all parties of political establishment and their trade and fake left accomplices, the SEP called on workers to form their own independent action committees in every workplace, factory, plantation and neighborhoods. It advanced the political initiative for a Democratic and Socialist Conference of Workers and Rural Masses (DSC) based on democratically-elected delegates from Action committees to advance the struggle for a government of workers and peasants, based on socialist policies.

“Without having a revolutionary party rooted in the working class, mass movements cannot win. This is the greatest lesson of Egyptian uprising in 2011, the popular uprising in Sri Lanka and the struggle now taking place in Bangladesh. We will utilise our election campaign to bring this lesson to the masses” the SEP candidate said.

Wijesiriwardena said that Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the candidate of the JVP-led National Peoples Power (NPP), claimed to have an agreement with people. “However, Dissanayake himself has told *Lankadeepa* that his government would continue the agreement with the IMF. This shows that JVP/NPP leader’s talk about an ‘agreement with people’ is an outright lie and they have actually sided with international finance capital against working people.”

The SEP candidate explained that the party’s campaign for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic was part of the broader international struggle for socialism. The SEP calls for workers in Sri Lanka to unify with their class brothers and sisters in South Asia and internationally and for action committees on the island to join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) initiated by the ICFI.

Wijesiriwardena concluded by calling workers, youth and rural poor to vote for the SEP in the election, support and participated in the party’s election campaign and most importantly to join the SEP to build it as the mass revolutionary party of the working class.



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