

Sri Lankan SEP holds general election public meeting

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held their first public meeting for the party's general election campaign at the Public Library Auditorium in Colombo on Friday evening. About 40 people, including party members and supporters, participated in the event which was broadcast live on the SEP's Facebook page.

The SEP is intervening in the November 14 parliamentary general elections, running 41 candidates for three electoral districts: in Colombo, Jaffna in the north, and Nuwara Eliya in the central plantation area.

Chairing the event, SEP General Secretary Deepal Jayasekera pointed out that the party, in opposition to the entire political establishment, including the ruling Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)/National People's Power (NPP) and their fake-left agencies, is fighting for an independent movement of the working class based on international socialism against imperialist war, International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity and the moves towards dictatorial forms of rule.

Jayasekera told the meeting that the newly elected President Anura Kumara Disanayake, who leads the JVP/NPP, had called the elections to consolidate its power through a parliamentary majority. This was not a democratic exercise, he said, but is to continue the harsh IMF-dictated social attacks initiated by former President Ranil Wickremesinghe and his government.

The speaker warned that a JVP/NPP government would unleash police-state repression to crush the resistance of workers, youth and the rural poor to IMF austerity. "Our election campaign is a part of our struggle to prepare the working class politically and organisationally for the fight that will develop in the coming period against the JVP/NPP government," Jayasekera said.

Sakuntha Hirimuthugoda from the IYSSE pointed to the growing danger of a third world war, noting Israel's imperialist-backed genocidal war in Gaza and the associated threat of a wider war in the Middle East, the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the US-led war preparations

against China. He told the meeting that the SEP, just as it did in the presidential elections, was the only party warning about the danger of world war.

Hirimuthugoda said the fake-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) had accommodated itself to the new JVP/NPP government by promoting dangerous illusions that it could be pressured to grant the social demands of the masses. Disanayake's election as president, the FSP claims, "is an expression of people's expectations," the speaker said.

In line with this false assertion, the FSP-controlled Inter University Student Federation (IUSF) has written to the new prime minister, Harini Amarasuriya, who is also education minister, outlining various demands by students and implying that the new government can be forced to grant the students' appeals.

"This is a patent lie," Hirimuthugoda said. "These opportunistic formations are again trying to tie workers and students to the capitalist government. In opposition to these organisations, we declare that youth and students cannot resolve any of their issues under capitalism but need to turn to the working class and fight for a socialist program."

SEP Political Committee member M. Thevarajah, who heads the party's slate of candidates for Nuwara Eliya district, explained how the Tamil parties have signalled their readiness to work with the Disanayake government, while covering up its pro-imperialist, right-wing and Sinhala chauvinist character.

Thevarajah told the meeting that the leader of Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) has described Disanayake as a "Marxist-Leninist" president who should work to resolve the issues facing the Tamil people. The New Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, a Maoist party working in the North and East and the plantation areas, has declared that it "expects" a lot from the new president.

The Tamil elite has responded to Disanayake's victory, Thevarajah said, in the hope that it can enter a deal with his government which will preserve their privileges at the

expense of the Tamil-speaking workers.

The meeting's main speaker was SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris, who leads the party's slate in the Colombo district. She briefly outlined the history of the JVP which emerged in the mid-1960s based on an eclectic mixture of Maoism, Castroism and Sinhala populism. This petty-bourgeois organisation, she explained, exploited the political confusion created by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which betrayed Trotskyist principles and entered a coalition government with the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1964.

During the 1980s, the JVP's reactionary Sinhala-chauvinist line became more prominent, and it was the most enthusiastic supporter of Colombo's anti-Tamil racialist war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In 1988–89, the JVP, as part of a rebellion against the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, carried out a series of fascistic attacks, killing hundreds of workers, trade unionists and leftist political opponents, including three members of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the predecessor of the SEP.

The JVP subsequently transformed itself into a party of the bourgeois political establishment, diverting and suppressing working-class opposition and helping to bring to power several governments, even serving in one of their cabinets.

"Today the JVP has taken direct responsibility of the maintenance of capitalism and bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka," Peiris said. She referred to Dissanayake's October 13 speech to NPP candidates and his insistence on the need for his party's "strong power in parliament."

The JVP/NPP leader's calls for "strong power," she said, are in order to continue with the IMF-dictated attacks, including the brutal suppression of popular opposition to this austerity. This has been demonstrated in Dissanayake's repeated assurances to big business that his administration is fully committed to the IMF program.

The SEP is the only party opposing the JVP's big-business agenda, Peiris continued, explaining this it was intervening in the election to develop the political consciousness of the working class.

"The SEP is alone in warning the workers about the developing imperialist global war," she continued, telling the meeting that the US and other imperialist powers are threatening mankind with a nuclear World War III by dangerously escalating Israel's genocidal war in Gaza and its military attacks in the Middle East, the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and US war preparations against China.

Dissanayake has made clear that he will continue to integrate Sri Lanka into the US-led, Indian supported military-strategic offensive against China. Earlier this

month, he welcomed the head of the US Pacific fleet to Colombo.

"The ruling class does not see a way out within the existing bourgeois order other than war. The only progressive solution is through the intervention of the international working class, as demonstrated by the Russian working class in the October Revolution in 1917 which led to the end of World War I," she explained.

Peiris stated that the global crisis of capitalism, which is driving the imperialist powers towards world war, is also creating conditions for socialist revolution. She referred to the mass uprising of Sri Lankan workers, youth and the rural poor in April–July 2022 that forced the resignation of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and the collapse of his government.

The JVP and the opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya blocked the independent mobilisation of the working class on a socialist program with manoeuvres for an "interim government"—calls which were supported by the FSP and the unions. This paved the way for the Wickremesinghe administration and its implementation of the IMF's demands.

Detailing how the SEP opposed the "interim government" trap, Peiris said: "The SEP proposed the formation of independent action committees of workers and rural poor and initiated a campaign to build a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Poor comprised of democratically elected delegates of those action committees. The party's proposal for a workers' and peasants' government committed to socialist policies would be discussed and adopted at such a congress."

The SEP's fight for this congress, she continued, spearheads the party's struggle for the building of an independent political movement of the working class rallying the rural poor to overthrow bourgeois rule, and establish a government of workers and peasants as a part of broader perspective for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

"We urge you to join the SEP, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, and for youth and students to join and build the IYSSE. Without a world party and strategy, the socialist revolution cannot be accomplished."



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