

Sri Lankan SEP speaks in Jaffna against the Iraq war

Our correspondent
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Socialist Equality Party central committee member M. Aravinthan delivered a lecture entitled “The Iraq war and tasks of the international working class” to a meeting of students, academics and workers at Jaffna University on March 26. The lecture, which attracted an audience of 60, was held under the difficult conditions that prevail in the war-torn north of Sri Lanka where it was the first public meeting held against the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Any public political meetings are rare in the north and east of Sri Lanka. While there is an uneasy truce in the protracted 20-year civil war between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the military still very much controls the town of Jaffna. The SEP managed to distribute copies of WSWs statements in Tamil and the Jaffna Science Association (JSA), which sponsored the meeting, placed a notice at the university.

JSA president Mrs. Selvanayagam, who opened and chaired the meeting, told the audience: “We have to oppose the war against Iraq. We also oppose injustice in any corner of the world. Workers are the backbone of our society. So workers have an important role to stop the war.” She thanked the SEP and Aravinthan for promoting the cause of the working class.

Aravinthan expressed the SEP’s appreciation to the JSA and its president for providing the opportunity to hold the lecture. He said the Social Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) condemned the brutal war being carried out by US imperialism and its military allies, Britain and Australia, against Iraq, one of the world’s poorest countries.

He drew the audience’s attention to the *World Socialist Web Site*, the daily organ of the ICFI, which is published in nine languages, including Tamil and

Sinhala. “It elaborates the political perspective and program for the international working class. Over the past six months, dozens of articles have been posted opposing US war preparations against Iraq and explaining its political and economic roots.”

Aravinthan said the US strategic interests in the war were bound up with establishing its control over the vast oil reserves in the Middle East and beyond and reducing oppressed countries like Iraq to American colonies. He reviewed some of the historical lessons of the 20th century and explained that the war in Iraq was sowing the seeds for another world conflagration.

“The capitalist system produces war. In the last century, two world wars took place because of the unresolved contradictions between the globalised economy and the nation state system. Workers and others in their millions have opposed the war internationally,” Aravinthan said.

However, these protests had not stopped the war, he pointed out. What was needed was an international socialist movement, politically independent of the capitalist and opportunist parties, that set out to abolish the profit system and reconstruct society to meet the social needs of mankind. That is the perspective of the WSWs and the SEP.

While there was limited time for discussion after the lecture, most of those present condemned the US war on Iraq. One lecturer commented: “It is good that you have organised this meeting. The other political parties in Jaffna are silent about the war.”

One of the students explained: “I follow your web site. Recently I downloaded one article to study. We are also opposing the war against Iraq. How does it happen that the British Labour Party supports the war and claims to be a working class party?” A discussion ensued about the class character of the Labour Party

and the anti-working class record of the Blair government.

In Jaffna, a number of Tamil-language newspapers—*Uthayan*, *Thinakural* and *Elanadu*—have been critical of the US invasion of Iraq. But the Tamil parties, including the LTTE, have remained silent on the issue. The LTTE, whose leadership is engaged in talks with the Sri Lankan government on a power-sharing arrangement to end the civil war in Sri Lanka, is being careful not to offend Washington.

The first antiwar protest took place on March 21 and involved about 50 Muslims who recently returned to Jaffna after being driven out of the town by the LTTE in 1990. Three further rallies have taken place over the last week.



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