

Socialist Equality Party holds meeting against Iraq war in Colombo

Our correspondent
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held a public lecture on Monday in Colombo to explain the party's opposition to the US-led invasion of Iraq and to outline the socialist alternative to imperialist war. SEP general secretary Wije Dias delivered the lecture entitled "The US war against Iraq and the tasks of the international working class," which focused on the war's historical roots.

Nearly 100 young people, workers and intellectuals attended. The SEP distributed 5,000 leaflets in Tamil and Sinhala announcing the meeting and publishing the *World Socialist Web Site* statement "Build an international working class movement against imperialist war". A number of students and unemployed youth, including readers of the WSWS, responded to the leaflet and joined the audience.

Chairing the meeting, WSWS Editorial Board member K. Ratnayake said 18 days of war had confirmed that the US invasion of Iraq was based on lies. "No weapons of mass destruction have been found," he said. "The 'liberation' of Iraq is nothing but a slaughter of defenceless men, women and children." He warned that the brutal invasion was just the first step in US plans to subjugate the world by military means.

Dias delivered the main report in Sinhala, which was translated for Tamil-speakers in the audience. He began his address by declaring that the SEP, along with its cothinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International, unequivocally condemned the barbaric imperialist invasion underway in Iraq. "We stand shoulder to shoulder with tens of million of workers and the oppressed throughout the world who oppose the war being waged under the leadership of the Bush administration."

Dias explained that moral indignation and protest

were not enough and that the working class had to have its own strategic stance to end the war. "The cowardly positions taken by the Sri Lankan government and other bourgeois regimes in the Indian sub-continent, in adapting to the imperialist aggression, underscore the need for the working class to take a politically independent stand in joining the class brothers internationally," he said.

He emphasised that the opposition of the Iraqi masses to Saddam Hussein had not turned into a welcome of US-led armies and a military occupation of the country. He pointed to a rare report in the media noting the fact that oil workers in Basra had decided not to return to work under a US occupation. "This is not a decision the Hussein regime or the Iraqi elite could have sanctioned because it fears the Iraqi working class more than it fears the imperialist aggression."

The unprecedented international protests against the Iraq war have a profound historical significance, Dias said. But the fact that Bush administration ignored the voice of millions of people poses a political challenge to the antiwar movement: how is it possible to stop imperialist war? To answer that question, he explained, it was necessary to examine the political lessons of the past century.

In reviewing the history of the two world wars, Dias pointed out that these inter-imperialist conflicts had both begun in disputes over spheres of influence and attacks on colonial and semi-colonial countries. The trigger for the First World War was the Austrian invasion of Serbia and for the Second World War, the Nazi attack on Poland.

He explained that the US would not stop at Iraq, and its plans for global hegemony would inevitably bring it into conflict with its imperialist rivals, setting the stage for another world conflagration. The Bush

administration's drive to establish US predominance stemmed not from a position of strength but a deep political and economic crisis at home.

"The international working class is the social force which can stop the world being dragged into barbarism by imperialism. This historical task requires the working class to be politically independent of the bourgeoisie and its reformist backers within the working class itself," Dias said.

The struggle against imperialist war had to be based on an international socialist program to overthrow the imperialist world order and reconstruct society on the basis of satisfying the pressing needs of the vast majority of mankind. Dias appealed for the audience to study the program of the International Committee and to support the *World Socialist Web Site* as the essential tool for building the world party of socialist revolution.

The lecture opened up a lively question-and-answer session, which was followed by informal discussion with some of the young people who attended. In response to an appeal for donations, 2,580 rupees, a quarter of the SEP's monthly fund, was raised. Participants purchased more than 950 rupees worth of Marxist literature.

One young person who stayed behind commented: "Even to think that the UN could stop this war is a joke. The UN was formed to defend the interests of the imperialists. What happened to the League of Nations, which was the forerunner of the UN? It was unable to stop Italy's invasion of Abyssinia. Today the UN faces the same fate.

"The Sri Lankan government is backing the US in this war. The US supports the government's peace process [in Sri Lanka]. That's why the Sri Lankan government is not opposing the US war. The US claims that 40 countries support its war against Iraq. Sri Lanka must be in that list."

Another young person joined in, saying the war demonstrated the Bush administration's fascistic character. "It is under the decay of capitalism that the capitalist class resorts to fascism. US is experiencing grave problems of unemployment and economic decline."

As the meeting broke up, a number of young people said they wanted to discuss the perspective of the International Committee further.



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