

SEP holds meeting in Colombo against US occupation of Iraq

Our correspondent
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The Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a public lecture in Colombo on April 21 to oppose the US neo-colonial occupation of Iraq and support the popular uprising of the Iraqi masses. Called at short notice, the meeting attracted more than 70 workers, young people and intellectuals, some of whom came after reading the meeting notice placed on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

K. Ratnayake, a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board, opened the meeting, explaining that the resistance to the US occupation of Iraq marked a new stage in the struggle against imperialism. Broad layers of the Iraqi population—Sunni and Shiite—were fighting against the continued US military presence in the country.

“Just as they lied about Saddam Hussein having weapons of mass destruction, Bush and Blair are trying to suppress the objective truth about the current uprising, by branding those involved as ‘thugs’ or ‘lawless elements’. But hundreds of people have been killed and thousands wounded in Fallujah alone, in order to put down this popular struggle. Among them are women and small children. Tens of thousands have been rounded up and detained,” he said.

“The international working class has a duty to support this fight against imperialism,” Ratnayake said. He explained that the events in Iraq had been ignored in Sri Lanka by the media and the major parties. The various pseudo-left parties, such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which made limited protests against the US invasion a year ago, were now totally silent.

Ratnayake introduced SEP General Secretary Wije Dias, also a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board, who delivered the main lecture.

Dias began by declaring that the SEP stood in the great revolutionary traditions of the socialist movement in declaring its support for the insurgent masses of Iraq in their heroic struggle against the attempt by imperialism to subjugate their country. He explained that the SEP was the only party holding a meeting in Sri Lanka to back the uprising in Iraq and unconditionally demand the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

“Facing the full military might of the US, the people of Iraq have joined forces, overcoming communal differences between the Sunni and Shia religious sects. These divisions, which were used by former dictator Saddam Hussein to maintain his repressive rule, have also been exploited by US and British to establish their domination over the oil-rich country,” Dias said.

“It is significant that the Iraqi resistance has appealed to the people in US for help. Moqtada al Sadr’s statement calling for support from Americans for the legitimate struggle of Iraqis is symptomatic of the internationalist sentiments contained in the insurgency in Iraq.”

Dias emphasised the necessity of a conscious internationalist program to fight imperialism. He said that while the perspective on which the Iraqi masses were fighting the US military was inadequate, socialists had a responsibility to support the struggle and fight for a correct political perspective.

Dias explained that the Iraqi resistance to the US occupation would have an impact among ordinary people in the US and within the American armed forces. According to a poll taken on April 5 in the US, 44 percent of the population already supported the withdrawal of troops from Iraq.

Dias highlighted the significance of the election campaign being waged by the Socialist Equality Party in the US. It was the only party that represented the aspirations of the tens of millions opposed to the war. Both the main parties of the political establishment—the Republicans and Democrats—were vehemently opposed to any withdrawal, insisting that US soldiers kill or be killed in a war that was not theirs.

The lecturer explained that the resistance in Iraq had been encouraged by the opposition expressed in international antiwar protests—the latest being on March 20-22. “Workers, youth and students in major cities around the world came onto the streets in their hundreds of thousands to oppose the occupation of Iraq... This is testimony to the fact that they have not accepted the grotesque lies peddled by Bush and

Blair to justify the Iraqi invasion.”

Turning to the state of US military forces in Iraq, he said: “According to a report by the mental health division of the US army, the morale in 72 percent of the units in Iraq is either low or severely low. The suicide rate among the soldiers is as high as 17.3 per 100,000. During the first Gulf War, the rate was only 3.6 per 100,000. Now 24,000 troops, who were to return home this month, are being ordered to stay in Iraq, under conditions where the number of soldiers getting killed is increasing daily. The Iraqi police force recruited by the US is fast disintegrating, with some deserters joining the rebel forces.”

Dias explained that the quagmire facing imperialism in Iraq did not mean that the US would pull back. “On the contrary, the brutal and barbaric drive by US imperialism for world hegemony will be heightened in the coming period. The change of US policy toward Israel, to give unrestricted support for Zionist expansionism and the repression of Palestinians, demonstrates how the Bush administration will react to the crisis it faces in the Middle East. US imperialism’s colonial ambitions will not stop at the Middle East and Central Asia. What it seeks is to restructure the globe under its control.”

The speaker pointed to the importance of China and India as sources of cheap labour in the globalised production processes. “China is now known as the ‘workshop of the world’ and India is fast becoming the ‘office of the world’ with its involvement in the expanding field of software and computer technology. In this context we have to examine the close US relations developing with the Indian sub-continent. The US has recently been strengthening its diplomatic and military links with all the regimes in South Asia—from Nepal across India and down to Sri Lanka.”

Dias noted that US Secretary of State Colin Powell had immediately congratulated Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga on her April 2 election victory in Sri Lanka. The first visit by her new Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, will be to Washington. These were not just formal courtesies, but underscored the designs that US imperialism has on the region, as well as the subservience of the local ruling elites.

“To defeat imperialism, the working class must assert its political independence and rally the poor in the struggle to establish its own political power. One vital lesson of the last century is that internationalism is indispensable. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, based on the reactionary nationalist theory of ‘socialism in a single country,’ has tragically vindicated the need for workers to unify internationally to defeat imperialism and to rebuild the world on a socialist basis. These are the two pillars—political independence of the working class and socialist

internationalism—on which the SEP stands as the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.”

Following the lecture, there was a lively discussion. A number of the participants indicated that they wanted further information about the SEP and its program. The meeting as a whole reflected a growing awareness of, and concern about, the US occupation of Iraq and its broader neo-colonial plans. Several of the participants spoke to our reporters.

SW, a young computer programmer, said: “I learned about this meeting through the *World Socialist Web Site*. I am a regular reader and closely followed the articles on the Iraq invasion. Through those articles I realised the real US interests that lay behind its invasion of Iraq. I have been a strong protester against the US actions from the outset.

“Your website is marvelous and its analyses are theoretically based. I have introduced it to my friends and some of them are also readers. Now we have realised that, without a scientific perspective, we cannot defeat US imperialism. I agree with the WSWS perspective and participated in this meeting for a further clarification.

“I went through the election manifesto of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Sri Lanka and saw the integrity of its program, which is presented to the Iraqi people as well as to the Sri Lankan masses. This time I voted for the SEP. I hope to work closely with the SEP in future.”

WS, a young woman working in an insurance company, explained: “I got to know about your website and organisation through a friend of mine. By voting for the SEP in the recent election, I showed my agreement with the WSWS. I think we have to have an international program to unite workers all over the world against these imperialist invasions. I know the SEP is the party that fights for such a program.”

SC told the WSWS: “I oppose this war. The US invaded Iraq to grab its oil resources. During the war the ruling party and the main opposition party here [in Sri Lanka] did not oppose it. That means they approved the war and supported the program of the imperialists led by the US. The NSSP and JVP are also supporting this imperialist program. Imperialism can’t be challenged by a movement based in a single country. It needs a world movement and a program, which is independent from capitalist system. The SEP has that perspective.”



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