

ICFI holds Paris memorial meeting for Raveenthiranathan Senthil Ravee

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The International Committee of the Fourth International held a memorial meeting April 15 for Raveenthiranathan Senthil Ravee (Senthil), a member of the ICFI based in London who was killed in a car accident February 28. The meeting, which was held at the FIAP Jean Monnet centre in Paris, was attended by more than 100 people, many of who came from the large Tamil community in Paris.

The meeting was addressed by Amuthan, main editor of the Tamil page of the *World Socialist Web Site*, and other leading members of the ICFI, including Wije Dias, national secretary of the Sri Lanka Socialist Equality Party (SEP), Chris Marsden of the British SEP and Peter Schwarz from the German SEP.

Behind the speakers were two large banners with photographs of Senthil accompanied by a poem in Tamil written for the occasion by an Indian comrade. Inscribed in Tamil it read, "Senthil fought for the World Socialist Revolution. It was the breath of his life. We continue that revolution. Senthil still breathes and we continue."

The meeting chairman, Stephane Hugues, welcomed Senthil's wife Anparasi and also Chelyan, Senthil's close friend and comrade who is still recovering from the injuries he sustained in the accident.

A minute's silence was observed in honour of Senthil at the start of the meeting.

Speakers noted the fact that people had come to the meeting from four continents—Europe, Asia, Australia and North America. This, they said, was a mark of the internationalism of Senthil and the ICFI, of which he was a valued member. With his death the working class had lost an important leader. But his life would be an inspiration for young revolutionary fighters, several speakers noted.

Amuthan stressed that Senthil's life and political development had to be understood in its historical framework. "Senthil was part of the generation which paid a high price for the betrayal of the LSSP (Lanka Sama Samaja Party), the former Trotskyist party in Sri Lanka that joined the capitalist government in 1964 becoming an ally of the national bourgeoisie," he said.

Other speakers paid tribute to the fact that as a young Tamil he had experienced the terrible racist repression of the Tamils. But he opposed a nationalist perspective, which supposedly

defended the Tamil people while ignoring the fate of workers of other nationalities. He had become a socialist internationalist through his contact with the ICFI and a protagonist for the emancipation of the working class in France, Great Britain and India.

Senthil, they said, tirelessly devoted himself to probing the historical issues in the period of the 1990s when political confusion stood in the way of the development of revolutionary consciousness among the broad masses.

Amuthan recalled many discussions with Senthil on the way forward for Tamil workers and "how we can stop the war." When Senthil started discussions with the ICFI he was able to understand the role of the nationalist and anti-working class organisations in Sri Lanka. The IC's internationalist perspective provoked alarm among Stalinist organizations on the island. For example, the Stalinist French Tamil Literature Group published a pamphlet entitled "Trotskyist Danger in Sri Lanka."

Senthil, having grasped the international perspectives of the ICFI would often say "The Sri Lankan problem does not start in Sri Lanka and its solution does not start in Sri Lanka." He never started from nationalist perspective, whether in Sri Lanka or in France.

Wije Dias told the meeting that from the speeches made at Senthil's funeral in England he had found the deep appreciation of his political life by the party comrades living in Europe.

"Senthil was born in Jaffna in 1969 and was raised as a child among the tea plantation workers. The ancestors of these workers were brought to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu in India to work in the British-owned rubber plantations in the mid-nineteenth century. But these workers, more than 12 percent of the population of the island at the time of independence in 1948, were deprived of their citizenship rights and voting rights on the grounds that they were immigrants." This was the beginning of the communal quagmire that has engulfed the country for the past twenty-five years in the form of a bloody civil war.

Dias explained that The Trotskyist Bolshevik Leninist Party of India, of which the Sri Lankan section was a part, warned the working class of the future communal carnage which would

follow the Citizenship Bills. By the mid-1950s, however, the Sri Lankan section, which had been renamed the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), embraced parliamentarianism and supported the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), thereby “extending cooperation in 1956 to the Bandaranaike government that was spearheading communal violence against Tamils,” he said.

Dias explained, “The political retreats of the LSSP received the fullest approval from the Pabloite International Secretariat, which was then led by Ernest Mandel”. It promoted the revisionist line of pressuring bourgeois parties and abandoning the struggle for the independence of the working class. These opportunist politics culminated in the historic betrayal of 1964, when the LSSP joined the bourgeois government led by the SLFP, he said.

Similar betrayals by the Stalinists and Maoists opened the way for right wing and authoritarian governments in India and Sri Lanka. The UNP introduced free market economic policies, and in 1983 unleashed the racist civil war.

This was the political environment in which Senthil was born and grew up. He was initially attracted to “Tamil nationalist groups that preached that the social liberation of Tamils could be found through a nationalist separatist programme,” Dias explained. “There is no doubt that for Senthil and many other Tamil and Sinhala youth the statement produced by the ICFI, “The situation in Sri Lanka and the political tasks of the Revolutionary Communist League”, in November 1987, was an eye-opener.”

It was the intervention of the ICFI that “laid the foundations for the continuity of the struggle for Trotskyism in Sri Lanka, from the founding of the Revolutionary Communist League in 1968, to the struggle carried forward by the Socialist Equality Party today.”

Dias concluded by saying, “It is under these conditions that the SEP in Sri Lanka and the ICFI internationally is engaged in the struggle to unify the working people and youth on a world scale for the struggle for socialist internationalism.”

Chris Marsden brought greetings “on behalf of all those in the SEP of Britain who loved and respected Senthil, but who are unable to attend today—many because they are actively campaigning to elect SEP regional lists to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.”

He said that Senthil was a pioneer “because he was amongst the first of a new generation of socialist fighters that is now finding its way to the Fourth International.” He joined when the death of socialism had been proclaimed by all and sundry, due to the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

“The British SEP is very proud indeed that one of our Tamil comrades, Thayan, is standing as a candidate for the Welsh Assembly, ” Marsden said. “It allows us to bring to our campaign the experiences of the working class in Sri Lanka and the Indian sub-continent and alert workers as to the dangerous

implications of Scottish and Welsh nationalism, particularly when all the fake left tendencies are championing separatism.”

He concluded by saying that Marxists seek no false comfort in God or hope for an afterlife. “Senthil lived his own life in furtherance of human progress and he will be remembered and honoured for doing so.”

Peter Schwarz spoke of the period when youth of the advanced countries defended the “Third World,” but this was done, “not on a socialist basis but a humanist one,” and had led to the dead end of support for bourgeois nationalism. He said very few workers from oppressed countries had been engaged in the struggle for the social emancipation of workers in the advanced countries. Senthil was such a man, however, which went to the heart of the perspectives of the ICFI. Oppression and poverty could only be overcome by a revolutionary struggle of the working class on an international level, including and above all the working class in the imperialist countries.

Schwarz pointed to signs of growing mass opposition from the worldwide movement against the war in Iraq in 2003 and the constant mass strikes and demonstrations against attacks on democratic rights within the advanced countries, especially in France. Yet the working class was politically disenfranchised.

Senthil devoted himself to the task of overcoming this disenfranchisement of the working class, Schwarz said. He understood that this requires an implacable struggle against the fake left. There was hardly a country where the bourgeoisie has at its disposal so many fake left parties, isolating the working class from a Marxist perspective, as in France. Senthil knew the terrible price of opportunism from his own experience. His personal life was determined to a large extent by the consequences of the historical betrayal of the LSSP. Schwarz recalled how Senthil had distributed thousands of leaflets opposing the opportunist policies of the French petty bourgeois left in Paris.

He stressed Senthil’s huge interest in historical and theoretical questions and said that if the working class does not learn the lessons of history it is condemned to repeating tragic experiences. The ICFI was the memory of the working class. Schwarz concluded by saying that the way to honour Senthil’s memory was by continuing the struggle he led.

An appeal for donations for a memorial fund to provide help for Senthil’s wife and his three young children, raised 3,175 euros and 300 pounds in cash plus 2,200 euros in pledges. More than 4,000 euros had already been raised.



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