

Sri Lankan ISSE meeting to demand release of jailed Iranian students

Our correspondents**25 March 2008**

The International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) held a public meeting in Colombo on March 10 to demand the immediate release of members of the Students for Freedom and Equality imprisoned by the Iranian government in December. The ISSE and Socialist Equality Party held a demonstration on same day in front of the Iranian Consulate and campaigned at the busy Fort Railway Station. (See: "Demonstration and meeting in Sri Lanka to protest prosecution of Iranian students")

Iranian police arrested 33 students who demonstrated against US military threats against Iran on December 4—"Students' Day". The day marks the killing of three students by police in 1953 during protests against visiting US Vice President Richard Nixon. In January this year, more students were arrested while protesting against the arrest of their colleagues.

SEP Political Committee member K. Ratnayake chaired the meeting, which was attended by ISSE and SEP members, students, young people and workers. Kapila Fernando, convener of the ISSE in Sri Lanka and SEP General Secretary Wije Dias addressed the meeting.

In his opening remarks, Ratnayake explained that the ISSE demonstration was part of an international campaign and emphasised that the Sri Lankan working class had a long history of taking up international issues. "Prior to the betrayal of Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which joined the bourgeois government of Madam Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964, there was a powerful tradition of Sri Lankan workers and youth agitating on political issues that affected the international working people. The ISSE is seeking to revive that internationalist consciousness among the present generation of youth," he said.

Fernando pointed out that the campaign for the

withdrawal of all charges against the Iranian students was an essential part of the perspective of the SEP and ISSE in building a movement for socialism. "The principal issue is internationalism, without which neither socialism nor democratic rights can be achieved in any country. Through the struggle of Sri Lankan workers and students for the release of these Iranian students, we are laying the basis for the conscious internationalist unity and cooperation of working class and the oppressed masses," he said.

"The radicalisation of Iranian students is part of a phenomenon that we see all over the world. It foreshadows the emergence of working class struggles on an international scale. The development of political activity among students is always an expression of deeper movements that are taking place in the social foundations of the capitalist order," he explained.

Fernando pointed out that the refusal of the Iranian consul to accept the ISSE's letter of protest reflected both the indifference of the regime to democratic rights and its fear of the international campaign. "The suppression of students who have protested against the US threats against Iran points to the bourgeoisie's organic inability to confront imperialist aggression," he said. "The ruling elite fears any independent movement of students and youth could become a catalyst for a genuine movement of working people against imperialism aggression."

"March 20 marks the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalition armies. The war has taken the lives of more than a million Iraqis and led to the death of nearly 4,000 US soldiers," he said. "The war drive of US imperialism is not an expression of its strength. Quite the contrary. Capitalism in the US is in an advanced stage of decay and its position as the world's super power depends on its military strength.

The doctrine of preemptive war, pursued by the Bush administration, aims at maintaining the dominant position of US imperialism against its international rivals through military means.”

Fernando concluded by explaining that a genuine struggle against imperialism in any country had to be waged independently of all sections of the national bourgeoisie. “In Sri Lanka, every bourgeois party and their petty-bourgeois allies, like the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), have lined up behind the so-called global war on terror to prosecute their own communal war against the Tamil minority. The civil war in Sri Lanka is being conducted with the economic and military assistance of the major powers. So it is necessary to understand that the fight against imperialism is essentially bound up with the struggle for the political independence of the working class and a socialist alternative.”

SEP General Secretary Dias began by reading out a letter of support for the Sri Lankan demonstration sent by the convener of the ISSE in the US. He then pointed out: “We are living in an era of sharp political shifts and shocks on a world scale. The emergence of the student movement of ‘radical left’ in Iran represents this trend. Two years ago these students broke from the organisation called the ‘critical left’ which had been following a political line to tail-end the reformist tendency in the Iranian bourgeoisie that is committed to openly collaborating with the imperialist powers.

“Although the ‘radical left’ is not part of the international Trotskyist movement, its new orientation towards a political organisation independent of all factions of the elite signifies a shift in the political thinking and understanding of the youth and the working people of that country. They have drawn some lessons from the eight-year experience with the ‘reformers’, prior to the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.”

Dias said that the recent visit of Ahmadinejad to Iraq revealed the Iranian regime’s accommodation to Washington’s aggressive agenda in the region. Despite his rhetorical demands for the US troops to leave the region, Ahmadinejad signed a seven-point deal that only strengthened Washington’s puppet government in Baghdad and dealt a blow to all those in Iraq, Iran and around the world opposed to the US occupation.

“Whether in Iran, Sri Lanka or in any other country,

the working people and the youth must organise under the banner of international socialism to find solutions to the democratic and social problems they face. This is possible only on the basis of an intransigent struggle against all political tendencies of the ruling elite and their left hangers on,” Dias said in conclusion.



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