

International greetings to the Sri Lankan SEP

21 July 2008

The following greetings were read out at a public meeting held by the Socialist Equality Party on July 16 in Sri Lanka to mark 40 years since the founding of its predecessor—the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL)—as a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The RCL was founded at a conference held on July 15-16 in Colombo in 1968, in the wake of the betrayal of the principles of Trotskyism by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP). The LSSP, which waged a powerful struggle for socialist internationalism during and immediately after World War II, underwent a protracted degeneration that culminated in its entry into the capitalist government of Madame Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964.

The RCL traced the roots of the LSSP's betrayal to the emergence of an opportunist tendency within the Fourth International led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel that abandoned the struggle for socialist internationalism and the political independence of the working class. Under the influence of the Pabloites, the LSSP steadily accommodated itself to the communal politics and parliamentary cretinism of the national milieu in Sri Lanka.

Of all those tendencies that emerged in the wake of the LSSP's betrayal, only the RCL/SEP, based on the lessons of the ICFI's struggle against Pabloism, has stood the test of time. As the greetings below make clear, the protracted and difficult struggle waged by the Sri Lankan Trotskyists over the past 40 years has a burning relevance for workers and young people today, particularly in Asia, Latin America and Africa, as they confront the global problems of economic crisis, communalism and war.

From David North, national secretary of the SEP (US) and chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Dear Comrades,

On behalf of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, I would like to extend to all the comrades in Sri Lanka our revolutionary greetings on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the founding of your organization.

It is often the case with major political events that their deeper significance only becomes clear after the passage of a substantial period of time. The founding of the Revolutionary Communist League in 1968 is such an event. The formation of the RCL established the continuity of the Trotskyist movement in a country that has always been critical for the international movement.

The protracted opportunist degeneration of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), culminating in its entry into the coalition government of Madame Bandaranaike in June 1964, was a historical betrayal that had a shattering impact upon the Trotskyist movement all over the world. The international Pabloite movement had played a major role in covering up the rightward drift of the LSSP, and the criticisms the Pabloites issued after N.M. Perera became finance minister raised far more questions than they answered.

The events in Sri Lanka were by no means isolated. They were part of a general international movement of opportunism that was wreaking havoc in the Trotskyist movement. Only the International Committee, which had been formed in 1953, had the ability to explain the theoretical and political origins of the betrayal in the perspective of opportunism.

A section of the LSSP broke with the leadership, forming the LSSP(R),

but it soon became clear that this organization was not anxious to pursue all too rigorously an investigation into the origins of the Great Betrayal. However there did exist a minority, particularly among the youth, that was determined to fight for political and theoretical clarification, and it was these forces that went on to establish the Revolutionary Communist League, with Keerthi Balasuriya as its general secretary.

In the years that followed, the RCL, which later became the SEP, built up an unchallengeable record of political courage and integrity. No objective, politically literate observer could deny the fact that the politics of the RCL/SEP has been characterized by deep principles and an extraordinary degree of political farsightedness. Among the many positions it took, allow me to cite just a few of the most important: Its critique of the JVP in the early 1970s, when the JVP still presented itself as a revolutionary Marxist movement; its opposition to the Indo-Pak war of 1971; its opposition to the racist constitution of 1972; its continuous and unyielding fight against the racist war waged by the Sri Lankan government; and its opposition to the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka in 1987-1990. Truly remarkable and inspiring has been the ability of the Sri Lankan section to combine an unflagging defense of the democratic rights of the Tamil people and intransigent opposition to war, with an uncompromising and principled critique of the nationalist politics of the LTTE.

It must be kept in mind that so much of this work has been conducted under the most difficult physical conditions, including the constant threat of repression and violence. The RCL/SEP has contributed its share of martyrs to the struggle for socialism.

As impressive as record of the RCL/SEP within Sri Lanka is, even more important has been its unflagging internationalist orientation. Indeed, it is precisely because it maintained this international outlook that the party was able to resist the pressures that always exist to adapt to national opportunism. In 1985, the leadership of the RCL emerged as a bastion of political principle against the treachery of the British Workers Revolutionary Party. None of those who worked with Comrade Keerthi during that critical period can forget his singular role. December 18, 1987 was certainly a black day in the history of the RCL and the International Committee. Nothing could have prepared the movement in Sri Lanka and internationally for Keerthi's sudden death at the age of 39. And yet, comrade Wije Dias and his comrades in the political leadership of the RCL responded in this terrible blow by continuing and developing the fight for Trotskyism.

The SEP in Sri Lanka marks its 40th anniversary against the backdrop of colossal changes in the state of world capitalism. To appreciate the implications of these changes, one must only consider today the fate of those organizations that have been your chief political adversaries—the LSSP, the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, the JVP, the myriad Pabloite and centrist tendencies, and the Tamil nationalist organizations. All of these organizations, even if they still exist, are deeply and irreparably discredited. Incapable of shame, they can look back on the past 40 years only with the hope of covering up their criminal betrayals. The SEP, on the other hand, can look upon its work both with pride and immense confidence in the future. The party you have built is the only genuine party that represents on the Indian sub-continent the principles and

program of international revolutionary socialism.

With revolutionary greetings,

David North on behalf of the Political Committee of the Socialist Equality Party (US)

From Nick Beams, national secretary of the SEP (Australia)

Dear Comrade Wije,

On behalf of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) let me extend the warmest revolutionary greetings to you and all the comrades of the SEP (Sri Lanka) on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the party.

The struggles waged by Keerthi Balasuriya, Wilfred (Spike) Pereira and the other founders of the Revolutionary Communist League were of decisive importance for our entire movement.

They played no small role in educating the cadre who founded the Socialist Labour League as the Australian section of the ICFI in 1972 and in training the members who have come into our party ever since.

The experiences and struggles of the RCL, and now the SEP, have always been of vital importance for our world movement, because they have illuminated tendencies and processes that are present everywhere, but that often first come to the surface in Sri Lanka. Since 1998, through the development of the *World Socialist Web Site*, we have been able to develop our collaboration in ways not possible before.

As we commemorate the founding of the Sri Lankan section, the objective historical significance of the struggle for principle, which has always characterised the work of our party, becomes even clearer. In essence, that struggle has been for proletarian internationalism—the very foundation of Marxism—against all forms of petty bourgeois opportunism, which is always and everywhere grounded on a nationalist perspective.

The meaning of that struggle can be seen today when not a single problem confronting the working class and oppressed masses all over the world—from war, crippling inflation in food and basic commodities, the ever-growing threat of global depression, to climate change—can be solved without an international program and perspective.

The post-war restabilisation of world capitalism rested on two central foundations: the counter-revolutionary role of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and the economic strength of American capitalism.

The first of those two pillars gave way in 1991-92. Now the second is in the process of collapse. This is the significance of the ever-deepening financial crisis—the greatest since the Depression of the 1930s. American capitalism, which once stabilised the world capitalist order, is now the greatest destabilising factor. This signifies that a new period of revolutionary struggles lie ahead in which we will be called upon to play that decisive role for which the past 40 years have been such an essential preparation.

We look forward to deepening our collaboration with you in the coming period.

With warmest greetings, once again, to all our members and supporters,
Nick Beams

National secretary,

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

From the SEP's exile group in Germany and France.

Dear Comrades,

We are pleased to convey our revolutionary greetings for the 40th anniversary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP). This anniversary is a milestone in the uninterrupted fight for international Marxism in the Asian subcontinent.

With this anniversary, as the only Trotskyist party in Sri Lanka, your fight along with your co-thinkers of the International Committee of the Fourth International enters into a new era. The intensifying capitalist crisis in the Indian subcontinent and the need for a revolutionary perspective for the working class demands that we take the political fight to a new stage.

Last month, we marked the anniversary of the political uprising of 1968

in France, which had deep impact on the political, social and cultural life of millions in Europe. The subsequent upheavals lasted seven years and took revolutionary forms on a number of occasions that forced the resignation of governments, brought down dictatorships and shook the foundation of the entire bourgeois system.

Simultaneously, 10,000 miles away, the Revolutionary Communist League, the forerunner of the SEP, was founded. In the midst of the great betrayal by the LSSP, the founding of the RCL was a significant development in the struggle of the international working class.

In extremely difficult political conditions, the RCL upheld the principles of Trotskyism in the Indian subcontinent, fighting against the betrayal of the LSSP and the politics of the Stalinist Communist Party. Based on the theory of Permanent Revolution, the RCL took a firm stand on the defence of the democratic rights of the Tamil minority. Its contribution under the leadership of late comrade Keerthi Balasuriya in advancing an independent working class standpoint on the Indian invasion in Bangladesh in 1971 and joining the fight against the Workers Revolutionary Party in defence of the International Committee strengthened the working class throughout the subcontinent.

The SEP's fight to unify the Sinhala and Tamil people under the leadership of the working class is the key to end the prolonged civil war in Sri Lanka. Through your fight against nationalism and separatism the party is seen among politically conscious youth and workers as the authentic alternative. We are confident that the anniversary will open up more opportunities for the party in its fight for socialism in the subcontinent.

With warmest regards,

Gnana for the SEP exile group in Europe

From SEP members on the Jaffna peninsula in northern Sri Lanka, who were unable to attend the Colombo meeting due to the renewed war that has cut the area off from the south of the island.

Dear Comrades,

I am sending these greetings proudly on behalf of comrades living in Jaffna to comrade Wije Dias and other comrades on the occasion of 40th anniversary of the founding of the Revolutionary Communist League. I regret the briefness of my message due to an illness and the inability of any of us in Jaffna to participate in the meeting.

People in the north are separated from their children, brothers and sisters and other relatives. They have lost their properties and are living in a dire condition without adequate food. This is like a life in a prison.

I am writing this message with the steadfast belief that there is no solution to the present crisis without building the SEP as the section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

History has assigned to us the responsibility of cutting a path for the working class. We have the strength for that. We have the experience and lessons of 40 years of political struggle. This experience has demonstrated that the working class must fight for its political independence against all the treacherous leaderships.

Our greetings are to all the comrades dedicated to building a leadership based on Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution.

Victory for the Socialist Equality Party and the Fourth International!
Long live the memory of comrade Keerthi Balasuriya!

S. Chandrasekaran, on behalf of the Jaffna comrades.

From the Socialist Labour League in India

Dear Comrades,

The Socialist Labour League in India, which is in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), sends its warmest revolutionary greetings to the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka on the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL)—the SEP's predecessor.

The very political existence of the RCL/SEP in the face of not only tremendous political and theoretical challenges from Pabloite opportunism

and petty-bourgeois radicals but also the physical dangers and difficulties over the past four decades vindicates the struggle waged by the ICFI for socialist internationalism based on Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution.

The staggering social polarisation and appalling social conditions of the vast majority of the working people of South Asia are an indictment of so-called independence from imperialism. Six decades of bourgeois rule in South Asia even brought the region to the brink of nuclear war between the two states—India and Pakistan—the reactionary products of the imperialist partition of 1947.

The venal Indian politicians, who boast about the “economic miracle” in “the world’s largest democracy”, sit on a ticking social time bomb with 400 million people living in poverty. They have no hesitation in employing police-state methods to suppress opposition. The current military-based regimes in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma only highlight the fact that the local ruling elites have found no other means to contain the explosive social, political and economic contradictions in their countries.

It was the LSSP's betrayal of Trotskyist principles, when its leaders joined the bourgeois government of Madame Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964, that allowed the communal politics of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie to predominate and ultimately led to the eruption of civil war in 1983. The LSSP's betrayal also contributed to the resurgence of Stalinist and Maoist forces in India.

The Indian Stalinists have been a crucial prop of bourgeois rule in India. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, they have increasingly shifted to the right and embraced capitalist free market policies. Their opposition to India's strategic alliance with US imperialism is based on nationalist considerations. As part of the Indian establishment, they fear that closer relations with the crisis ridden and militarist US would threaten India's own geo-political interests.

In the struggle against the LSSP's betrayal, the RCL leaders took the initiative to extend the struggle for Trotskyism throughout the Indian subcontinent. An SEP statement declared: “The allies of the Sri Lankan workers are not to be found in the political establishment in Colombo but among their class brothers and sisters throughout the region and around the world. The SEP fights for a federation of socialist republics of South Asia as the means of advancing the unity of the working class throughout the region and internationally.”

Indeed the working class and youth in India and internationally have a great deal to learn from the difficult and protracted political struggle waged by the SEP and its predecessor the RCL, for the political independence of the working class on the basis of socialist internationalism.

We in India continue to learn from your consistent struggle for Marxist principle and pledge to collaborate with you in the struggle for a federation of socialist republics of South Asia.

Yours comradely,

Arun Kumar for the Socialist Labour League in India



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