

Sri Lankan SEP marks 70th anniversary of Fourth International

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) in Sri Lanka held a public meeting in Colombo on November 27 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International. The meeting addressed the necessity of an international socialist perspective derived from the struggles of the Fourth International to overcome the current global breakdown of capitalism.

About 100 workers, youth and professionals from Colombo and suburbs, as well as other areas including Ambalangoda and Galle in the southern province, Chilaw in the north-western province and the central plantation districts, attended the meeting. A significant number of young students were in the audience.

K. Ratnayake, a member of the SEP Political Committee, chaired the meeting. After outlining the theoretical and political struggle waged by Leon Trotsky to found the Fourth International in 1938, Ratnayake pointed out that 70 years later world imperialism was again dragging mankind towards economic devastation and war. He explained that the program and perspective of socialist internationalism fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) was the only means for addressing the crisis.

The main speaker was SEP General Secretary Wije Dias, who began by remarking: “We recognise Leon Trotsky as the most farsighted and steadfast socialist internationalist in the twentieth century. As long ago as 1923, Trotsky initiated his struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy, which attempted to strangle October Revolution of 1917 on the basis of the nationalist conception of ‘socialism in one country’.” After the criminal role of the Stalinists in the coming to power of Hitler in 1933, Trotsky concluded that the Third International was dead for the purposes of socialist revolution and called for the building of the Fourth International.

Turning to the current global economic crisis, Dias noted that various bourgeois pundits argued that capitalism would overcome the present turmoil as it had in the past. “Those apologists for capitalism simply ignore the massive devastation of human life in World War II through which capitalist stability was re-established. Compared to World War I and World War II in which atomic bombs were used in the final days, World War III will be fought

with nuclear weapons, that will annihilate the world. There remains only one solution to prevent that destruction—world socialist revolution,” he explained.

Dias countered the attempts of the ruling elites all over world, including Asia, to downplay the impact of global financial crisis on their own countries. “Investors in India and China have already begun to move out,” he said. “China’s industrial output has declined by up to 50 percent in some areas. The Indian government has demanded that industrialists reduce the prices of their products, which will lead to the closure of industries.

“The government in Sri Lanka is completely in the dark over how to deal with this global crisis. Tourism minister Milinda Moragoda admitted recently: ‘Sri Lanka will be affected by the global financial crisis for at least another two to three generations yet most experts are of the view that Sri Lanka will be insulated from the financial crisis that has gripped the West and many other countries. The experts are wrong’.”

Dias warned that the crisis would have devastating consequences for the jobs and living standards of working people. “The government of President Mahinda Rajapakse, like its predecessors, is heavily indebted. The huge burden of more than two decades of war, which burns up money, is being compounded by the impact of global crisis. Under the current global credit crunch and outflow of investment, the economic crisis faced by Sri Lankan ruling class will be further intensified,” he said.

“The ideas of the so-called lefts are not so different from the economists of the Rajapakse government. Vickramabahu Karunaratne, the leader of the Naya Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), said in his regular column in the Sinhala weekly *Lakbima* on October 19: ‘There exists an American hegemony and monopolised globalisation. This must be changed basically and the world must be transformed into a democratic, egalitarian globalisation. If the capitalism fails to do that the verdict for the maintenance of capitalism will be a decline, at least for a short period.’

“According to Karunaratne, ‘American hegemony and monopolised globalisation’ can be changed into ‘a democratic, egalitarian globalisation’—all under capitalism. And he also argues

if the capitalist system fails to do that it will face a decline ‘for a short period’.” As Dias explained, Karunaratne was covering up the decisive crisis of capitalism as a whole and proposing adjustments to the system in order to block a struggle for socialism.

“His position is an apology for the capitalist system worldwide. Contrary to those ‘lefts’, the SEP and ICFI insist that the decisive and central issue for the working class and youth today is the adoption of a Marxist world view,” Dias said. He called on the audience to take up the struggle for world socialist revolution—the perspective and program of the Fourth International—by joining the SEP.

In the discussion that followed, one member of the audience asked if capitalism could be stabilised through a new world war. Dias explained that capitalism had survived after the massive destruction of World War II on the basis of two factors—the economic strength of the US and the political betrayals of Stalinism.

“However, following a World War III fought with nuclear weapons, it is uncertain whether the world would survive. Even if capitalism were to be somehow re-established from the wreckage who would replace the US which is in decline?” he asked. Noting that some analysts pointed to China as a rising power, Dias explained that the Chinese economy was completely dependent on the US and world economy which was in crisis.

“Rather than speculating what will happen after a world war, we should be considering how to prevent such a conflict by abolishing capitalism. That has been the whole tradition of the revolutionary movement,” he said.

After the meeting, WSWs correspondents spoke to a number of the participants.

A final year economics student at the University of Colombo said: “When we were collecting facts and figures for an assignment on the world financial crisis, we saw some posters for this lecture and decided to participate. From the economists and the various commentators in every corner of the world, we hear that world economy is facing a deep crisis. But we can’t find out the root cause of the crisis from them. Some commentators say that this crisis is greater than the depression after 1929 [the Wall Street stock market crash]. We know a little about that depression. We thought that we could learn about the causes of the crisis and more about the 1929 crash from this lecture.

“After speaking with you for this short time, we now know there are massive political and social implications bound up with these economic crises. Almost all the academics divide economics from politics and society. Actually we were not interested in the politics lying behind the financial crisis. The concept you presented, the contradiction between the nation states and the globalised economy, is new to us—even though it is a scientific argument.

Yes, it is the root cause of the inter-imperialist conflicts. I was highly impressed by that and hope to study more about it.

“We knew that millions of people died in the Second World War. However, we didn’t see the Second World War as a product of capitalist crisis expressed in the depression following 1929. We thought it was the product of cruel rulers like Hitler. In this light, we can look at Sri Lanka’s civil war. It can’t be the product of a cruel man. We have to examine the social, economic and political evolution of Sri Lanka over the last century.”

An international relations student from the University of Colombo said: “There are frequent discussions on the television channels about current economic crisis. But your leaflet explained it as a crisis of capitalism that raised the potential for socialist revolution. I came to this meeting to have a better understanding of that.

“I am impressed by your work through the WSWs on an international scale and your attempts to develop a socialist consciousness in Sri Lanka. I think that this is the movement with whom I can discuss, to whom I can present my political questions, and with which I can take initiatives. It is encouraging to have such a movement, which presents a continuous analysis.”

Another international relations student commented on the SEP’s stand on Sri Lanka’s civil war: “Others present peace talks, [and a] ceasefire as solutions to the war. But what issues led to the war? Solutions have to be presented to those issues. The war was the outcome of discrimination against Tamils. Other parties have no solution to that. When I studied the SEP’s politics and its solution for the war, I realised that it considers the war not as an isolated issue. It insists on the working class taking political power and fights for that. I see that as a big difference from other parties.”



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