

Wije Dias addresses Sri Lankan university students on global economic crisis

Our correspondents
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) general secretary Wije Dias delivered a public lecture at Colombo University on December 3 entitled "The inherent crisis of capitalism and the socialist alternative". It was the first public lecture on socialist politics at the university in the past four years.

Vinivida Pravada Kavaya (Transparent Thesis Circle), a student group at the university, invited Dias to give the lecture. About 30 students participated. Sanjaya Wilson, a final-year law student, chaired on behalf of the student circle. The International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) in Sri Lanka, working with the SEP, took the initiative in campaigning among students for the meeting.

Dias began by thanking *Vinivida Pravada Kavaya* for the invitation. He explained that the deepening global recession was already having devastating consequences for working people, youth and the oppressed masses around the world. He warned that the crisis of capitalism raised the danger of intensifying great power rivalry and war.

The speaker quoted from the founding program of the Fourth International written by Leon Trotsky in 1938. Pointing to the maturity of the conditions for socialist revolution, Trotsky emphasised: "Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership."

Dias said: "We are now discussing how to overcome another threatening catastrophe." Insisting on the necessity of drawing the lessons of history, he detailed the inherent contradictions of world capitalism, most fundamentally between world economy and the outmoded nation-state system, that produced two world wars. The Russian Revolution in October 1917, Dias explained, was the

conscious response of the working class under the leadership of Bolshevik party led by Lenin and Trotsky, to the devastation of war.

"When we talk about a collapse of capitalism as a result of its contradictions, it does not mean that the system will suddenly come to a full stop. What we are examining is a deepening crisis of the capitalist system," Dias said. The disaster being prepared by the ruling class directly posed the necessity of the working class taking power.

Following World War II, Dias explained, US imperialism took the initiative in restabilising capitalism, using its own economic might. That was only possible because of the betrayals by the existing leaderships of the working class, above all by the various Stalinist parties around the world. After a period of boom in the 1950s, the US economic position was weakened by the revival of its rivals and the capitalist system faced another crisis between 1968 and 1975 that saw the eruption of workers' struggles worldwide.

Dias explained that the globalisation of production, using revolutionary changes of technology to integrate economic processes around the world, was the response of the ruling class to the economic crisis. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the bourgeoisie around the world declared socialism dead and capitalism as the only viable system.

However, as the Trotskyist movement explained at the time, the collapse of the Soviet Union was only the sharpest expression of the bankruptcy of all programs based on national economic regulation. The processes of globalisation had only exacerbated the fundamental contradictions of capitalism that now found their expression in the eruption of a new crisis of capitalism.

Dias explained that US imperialism was seeking to use military means to offset its economic decline. "The aim behind the Bush administration's invasions of Afghanistan

and Iraq is to establish US hegemony over energy resources in Central Asia and prevent its economic rivals from having access to them. Inter-imperialist rivalry is developing once again."

The speaker pointed out that Sri Lankan leaders and government officials had tried to play down the impact of global economic crisis. But dramatic falls in prices for tea and rubber, together with the contraction of the US and European markets, were already affecting many working people. The jobs of hundreds of thousands of workers were at stake. The war and the government's huge military expenditures were sharpening the country's economic crisis and creating an explosive political situation.

"Objective conditions are developing to win workers and youth to a socialist perspective and program. They have no other alternative to defend their rights and conditions," Dias emphasised. He urged the audience to take up the responsibility of fighting for a socialist future by studying the SEP's perspective and program and joining the ISSE.

The lecture was followed by an animated discussion. One student referred to the development of the service industry and the numerical increase of workers in that sector. He asked if the consciousness for a working class revolution existed among this layer.

Dias explained that workers in the service sector were part of the working class. "The numerical strength of the global working class has increased immensely with the integration of the previously closed economies of China, Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and India into the world economy. It is a huge revolutionary factor.

"The lack of revolutionary consciousness is not an organic defect of the working class. The historical reason lies in the past betrayals of the leaderships of the working class," Dias said. He referred in particular to the consequences of Lanka Sama Samaja Party's (LSSP) "great betrayal" in 1964 in entering the bourgeois coalition of Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The lack of a socialist alternative based on the unity of the working class created great confusion and led to the formation of petty bourgeois radical movements based on communal politics—the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP) among impoverished rural Sinhala youth and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) among oppressed Tamil.

Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri, a university lecturer and leader of the post-modernist "X-group", expressed his sceptical attitude towards the revolutionary capacity of the working

class, by asking: "If the working class did not like the betrayals, why didn't those movements which opposed the betrayals use that opposition of working class?"

Dias explained those responsible for political betrayals or their political apologists typically attempt to foist the blame onto the working class. "Betrayals have an effect. We can't underestimate it. We need to take a historical approach to that issue," he said.

Citing the example of the betrayal of Chinese revolution in 1927 by the Stalinist bureaucracy, Dias pointed out that Trotsky's young supporters had declared that the vindication of his warnings would enhance the position of the Left Opposition. Trotsky, however, warned that the defeat would demoralise Soviet workers and strengthen the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Dias again cited the LSSP's betrayal in Sri Lanka, which had an enormous impact on the consciousness of workers and youth. The betrayal not only removed a powerful political challenge to the capitalist class but also undermined the political independence of the working class. That weakened the working class, led to the dominance of communal politics and eventually to the country's ongoing 25-year civil war.

Dias explained that in periods of political reaction, it was difficult for revolutionary ideas to make any headway. "Mere political arguments can not automatically cut across the impact of betrayals. There have to be great changes in the objective world that force workers to think anew," he added. Such a period was starting to emerge, he said, that would compel young people and workers to seriously consider the socialist alternative to the barbarism of capitalism.



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