

Sri Lankan SEP holds meeting on lessons of World War II

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) in Sri Lanka held a well-attended meeting in Colombo on November 10 to mark the 70th anniversary of World War II.

SEP political committee member Nanda Wickremasinghe, who chaired the meeting, explained that in the midst of the greatest global economic crisis since the 1930s, it was necessary for the working class to grasp the necessary political lessons of the events of World War II.

“The Second World War was the culmination of three decades of crisis ushered in by the economic downturn of 1913 and the eruption of World War I in 1914. Following the Russian revolution of 1917, revolutionary situations emerged in Germany 1918, Germany 1923, Britain 1926, China 1927, Germany 1933-34, France and Spain 1936 that were betrayed by Social Democracy and Stalinism. The capitalist class saved its neck through the murder of over 100 million people in two world wars.”

Wickremasinghe said that it was only on the basis of this huge destruction of the productive forces, the betrayals of Stalinism and American economic strength that world capitalism was able to restabilise after World War II. “That period has definitively ended. Once again, the question of a re-division of the world is on the agenda. The US is now the world’s chief debtor nation. It faces not only its old rivals but new ones like China,” he said.

The speaker pointed out that militarism was once again on the rise, as underlined by the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for hegemony in the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. “It is evident once again that the capitalist system is a reactionary shackle on the productive forces. The danger of a Third World War

fought with nuclear weapons is real. As Rosa Luxemburg explained, the alternatives before the working class are socialism or barbarism.”

ISSE convenor Kapila Fernando explained: “World War II was not the product of the evil of Hitler or Mussolini or other ‘bad people’ but was the result of the inherent and irresolvable contradictions of capitalism. Ex-radicals maintain that there will not be another world war because the huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons mean destruction for all. But the question arises as to why the major powers are building up such arsenals in the first place; a question for which these people have no answer.”

Fernando cited the recent comments of Sri Lankan analysts who claimed that China’s rise to the world’s largest economy by 2041 would preclude war by blocking the US and European powers. Far from ending the danger of war, he explained, the emergence of China only heightened tensions between the major powers. At the same time, deepening social tensions within all of these countries, including China, were leading to the emergence of revolutionary crises and the opportunity to abolish capitalism.

SEP general secretary Wije Dias, who delivered the main report, began by explaining: “We do not wish for another destructive world war, but the profound contradictions of capitalism are driving the capitalist powers to war. The International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections are drawing the lessons of World War II to prepare the working class and oppressed masses for the future struggles.”

Dias quoted from Leon Trotsky’s brilliant analysis in *War and the Fourth International* written in 1934 in which he analysed the situation five years before war

began. “The catastrophic commercial, industrial, agrarian and financial crisis, the break in international economic ties, the decline of the productive forces of humanity, the unbearable sharpening of class and international contradictions mark the twilight of capitalism and fully confirm the Leninist characterisation of our epoch as one of *wars and revolutions*,” Trotsky wrote.

“Inside the individual countries, the historic blind alley of capitalism expresses itself in chronic unemployment, in the lowering of the living standards of the workers, in the ruination of the peasantry and the town petty bourgeoisie, in the decomposition and decay of the parliamentary state, in the monstrous poisoning of the people by ‘social’ and ‘national’ demagogy in face of an actual liquidation of social reforms, of the pushing aside and replacement of old ruling parties by a naked military-police apparatus (*Bonapartism*, of capitalist decline), in the growth of fascism, in its conquering power and smashing of each and every proletarian organisation.”

Dias said that these were the conditions developing today. In the aftermath of World War II, an opportunist trend known as Pabloism emerged within the Fourth International that adapted to the apparent, relative stability of world capitalism. It claimed that the contradictions of capitalism had been overcome in the advanced capitalist countries and rejected the revolutionary capacity of working class.

Dias explained how these theories were torn apart by the economic and political crisis of capitalism that erupted again in the late 1960s, including in the US. By the early 1970s, the working class was on the offensive all over the world. “However these struggles were blocked and betrayed by Social Democracy and Stalinism abetted by Pabloism. That is why it is profoundly important to build an independent revolutionary party of working class,” he said.

The speaker turned to the experiences of the working class in Sri Lanka during the Second World War. “Leon Trotsky’s writings had a profound impact on a group of young intellectuals. The Popular Front politics of Stalinism paved the way for Franco’s fascist dictatorship in Spain and the shoring up of bourgeois governments in France. A group of youth in Sri Lanka formed the ‘T[rotsky] group’ and then Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) in 1935.

“Four years after the LSSP’s establishment, its leaders identified the need to openly declare the party’s Trotskyist principles. They passed a resolution condemning the treacherous role of Stalinist Communist International in betraying the working class in France and Spain. Five leaders led by S.A. Wickramasinghe opposed the resolution and formed the Stalinist Communist Party of Sri Lanka.”

Dias explained that Stalin first entered an agreement with Hitler that paved the way for the Nazi invasion of Poland and the eruption of war in Europe. Then, after Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Stalin switched to the other imperialist camp led by Britain. Based on Trotsky’s analysis, the LSSP opposed the war and exposed the Stalinists’ claim that it was a war for democracy against fascism.

“British imperialism correctly identified the danger posed by the existence of a Trotskyist party in Sri Lanka. The colonial government banned the LSSP in 1940 and detained its key leaders. However, they escaped from jail and moved to India. There, the LSSP leaders worked to form the Indian Bolshevik Leninist Party (BLPI) to unite the working class in South Asia against British imperialist rule.”

In concluding, Dias stressed the importance of revolutionary leadership and called on those present to join the Socialist Equality Party as the means for fighting for a socialist alternative to war.



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