

# Sri Lankan SEP holds May Day meeting

**Our correspondents**  
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) held a meeting at New Town Hall in Colombo on May 1 to mark the International Workers Day. About 150 workers, youth, professionals and housewives attended the meeting, including SEP members and supporters from Jaffna and other parts of the island, as well as plantation workers from the central hill districts.

The meeting was chaired by SEP Political Committee member K. Ratnayake who began by extending revolutionary greetings to the SEP's sister parties in US, Canada, Germany, Britain and Australia. He explained that May Day 2010 was being held as a new stage of working class struggles open up against world capitalism, which now faces a deepening crisis.

Turning to the situation in Sri Lanka, he explained: "On May 18 last year, Rajapakse declared military victory against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and claimed it would lead to peace and prosperity for all. One year later the record completely contradicts this claim."

After killing LTTE leaders, the military forcibly detained about 280,000 Tamil civilians, Ratnayake said. "About 10,000 youths were picked out and imprisoned as LTTE suspects, while 80,000 Tamils remain incarcerated in camps guarded by armed soldiers. Others have been dumped in the north without adequate means to live and the military occupation has been tightened."

He added: "The Sri Lankan government faces a far worse economic situation after mortgaging the country to wage its war and as a result of the world recession. The International Monetary Fund has withheld its loan and is demanding the implementation of harsh austerity measures. The government is now preparing to impose these savage attacks which will fuel class battles."

SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris pointed to political developments in South Asia. India claims a growth rate of 7.2 percent, she said, but inflation was rising with food costs increasing by 25 percent during the past year. "This has seriously affected workers and the rural toilers and the official poverty rate has increased to 37.2 percent."

"India's so-called growth has not brought improvements for the poor but for the capitalist class," Peiris said. Deteriorating living standards and government privatisation plans had sparked recent strike action by government employees in Jammu Kashmir,

telecom workers and proposed walkouts by coal miners.

In Pakistan the situation was more acute, she continued, where the government had bowed to pressure from Washington and was now "waging a war against its own people" with social misery and daily civilian casualties rampant throughout the country.

While the political and economic crisis took slightly different forms in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the underlying content was the same. The 1947 communal partition of South Asia by British imperialism in league with the local capitalist class, particularly India and Pakistan, was the root cause of conflicts between these countries and the ongoing division of the working class. "The present impasse can only be overcome by uniting the working class across the borders of these countries and on the basis of international socialism," she said.

SEP Political Committee member M. Thevarajah addressed the meeting in Tamil and explained the principled struggle waged by the SEP, and its predecessor the Revolutionary Communist League, to defend the democratic rights of Tamils.

"We are fighting to unify Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers in the common struggle to overthrow capitalist rule and establish a workers' and peasant government in the form of a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam," he said. While opposing the war and demanding withdrawal of Sri Lankan forces from the north and east, the SEP opposed the LTTE's bourgeois separatist program. "Against every form of communal, chauvinist and nationalist politics, our policy is the socialist unity of workers within countries and across the countries against capitalism," he said.

Kapila Fernando, the ISSE convener in Sri Lanka, explained how the Rajapakse government was intensifying its attacks on youth and the right to free education. "The new education minister Bandula Gunawardena has cited the limited number of positions in government universities and argued that private institutions would provide opportunities for those who failed to find a place in government universities," Fernando said.

"This is a fraud. The high fees demanded by private universities—for example, the recently opened private medical college in Malabe charges 6 million rupees for a degree—means that only the sons and daughters of wealthy will be able to go to these institutions.... Successive Sri Lankan governments have

created a two-class education—one for the wealthy and one for the poor,” he said. Although the Rajapakse government claims unemployment in Sri Lanka was low, young people faced a rampant job crisis. Fernando urged youth to turn to the working class and fight to build the SEP and the ISSE.

SEP General Secretary Wije Dias, a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board, delivered the main speech at the May Day meeting. Dias said that capitalism faced its greatest economic crisis since the 1930s depression and that working people in every country faced massive attacks on their wages, jobs, working and living conditions, and basic democratic rights. “The economic crisis that began with the collapse of huge international financial establishments in September 2008 has not passed away but deepened. This crisis now takes more malignant forms and is driving countries into state bankruptcy. Greece is only the first of a series of countries that will face insolvency.

“At the same time we see a new wave of struggles by the working people spreading throughout Europe. Nearer to our country in India hundreds of thousands of workers and rural poor are being drawn into struggles against government attacks on jobs, wages and social rights.

“No country is immune from this global crisis,” he continued, “despite the declarations to the contrary by various governments, such as in Sri Lanka. The Rajapakse government was rescued by an IMF loan when it was on the verge of default last year due to its huge war expenditure and the drastic impact of the global recession on the Sri Lankan economy. The attacks on the working class and the rural poor, which the government must impose in line with IMF dictates, were postponed until after the elections. But they are only postponed.

Dias explained that the aspirations of workers and peasants in Russia were suppressed under a wave of chauvinism during World War I, only to explode as revolutionary struggles within two and a half years and ultimately produce the socialist revolution under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. “The task of the revolutionary party, that is us, is to politically prepare the working class and youth to play the role undertaken by the Russia workers in October 1917,” he emphasised.

Dias then pointed to a provocative article published on April 23 in the government-owned English-language *Daily News*. The article’s author, Malinda Seneviratne, who had been involved with the Friends of the People, which developed into the Sinhala racist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), wrote: “Someone once said that 99 percent of the Opposition can be purchased and that the remaining 1 percent must be eliminated, meaning killed.” Seneviratne then named the SEP as that one percent and named Wije Dias and another leading SEP member, Nanda Wickremasinghe, stating that: “They are politically honest. Un-purchasable.”

Dias told the May Day meeting that the article had been “prepared and published prominently in editorial pages in order to

draw to the attention of the state security forces and associated murder squads towards the SEP ... We firmly declare that we, as Trotskyists, belong to a tradition that cannot be intimidated by these types of threats and death warrants,” the SEP general secretary said to the applause of the audience.

Referring to the bogus anti-capitalist posturing of the ex-radicals, such as the French Pabloites and others, Dias said these organisations existed to “throw sand in the eyes” of the working people and youth and divert them from the independent political struggle for state power. “We are not just against capitalism,” he said, “we are for the overthrow of capitalism. We are for the establishment of working class power, supported by the rural poor, as an alternative to the capitalist rule.

“We have had many experiences with pseudo anti-imperialist movements, which all made deals with the imperialist powers. We stand for the overthrow of imperialist world order. This is why we fight to build an international party of the working people for socialism in this South Asian region and internationally. Our perspective is to unite the workers, youth and oppressed people of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim in this island to establish a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of a union of socialist republics of the region and worldwide.”

Dias concluded his address by urging the audience to regularly read the *World Socialist Web Site* and to join and build the SEP as a mass revolutionary party. A generous collection for the party fund raised over 17,000 rupees (\$US150) and the meeting concluded with the singing of the “Internationale”.



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