

Sri Lanka: SEP and ISSE hold May Day meeting

Our correspondents
9 May 2012

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) held a May Day meeting at the New Town Hall in central Colombo last week with more than 200 workers and youth in attendance from the city, plantation areas, Jaffna and other parts of the island.

Chairing the meeting, SEP Political Committee member K. Ratnayake sent greetings to the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Sri Lankan workers, he said, should treat with contempt the reactionary May Day message of President Mahinda Rajapakse who had called on the population to rally behind the national flag and defeat international “conspiracies” to destabilise the country.

The real conspiracy, Ratnayake explained, was being directed against working people with its “headquarters located at the president’s office which is carrying out the IMF’s dictates.”

SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris reviewed the developing political crisis in South Asia. US drone attacks have resulted in the death of 3,000 civilians in Pakistan, fuelling growing opposition to the war and imperialism. The Obama administration was also strengthening its strategic partnership with India and putting pressure on New Delhi to support the war drive against Syria and Iran. India recently tested a new long-range missile sharpening tensions with China and Pakistan.

Addressing the meeting in Tamil, SEP Political Committee member M. Thevarajah explained the cynical political calculations behind the sponsorship by the US and other imperialist powers of the recent UNHCR resolution criticising the Sri Lankan government over human right violations during its war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

“The genuine grievances of the Tamil masses in Sri Lanka have never been a concern to these powers. The same thing could be said of the Tamil bourgeois parties, whose central aim is to reserve a place in the Colombo establishment,” he added.

ISSE convener Kapila Fernando told the meeting: “The austerity measures unleashed by governments all over the world have created enormous hardships for workers and youth in every continent. In America, Asia and Europe, youth unemployment has climbed as high as 50 percent.”

In Sri Lanka, Fernando explained, there have been continuous protests by university students, called by the Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF). But the IUSF has sought to divert the anger of students into futile appeals to the Sri Lankan government. Fernando called on youth to turn to the working class and struggle for socialism.

SEP General Secretary Wije Dias delivered the main report to the meeting. He reminded the audience about the international political situation a year earlier, with the eruption of mass uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East amid the emergence of a new stage in the economic crisis of the world capitalism.

“These struggles spread to the US—the heart of world capitalism—with workers in Wisconsin relating their

struggle with those in Egypt to overthrow the Mubarak dictatorship. Occupy Wall Street movement then followed, spreading through many continents, and, pointed to in international form, the struggle against social inequality,” he said.

“We supported these developments,” Dias said, “but recognised the vast gap that existed between the level of political preparedness of those involved and the objective situation. The main question was the lack of a revolutionary perspective and leadership.

“The ICFI grasped this crucial challenge confronting the masses and fought to overcome the influence of the pseudo-leftists, who assisted the Muslim fundamentalists in Tunisia and Egypt, and the union bureaucracies in US, Greece and other places,” he said.

Dias explained the significance of the defence of the political legacy of Leon Trotsky, the greatest revolutionary strategist of the twentieth century. He outlined the key role played by David North, the US SEP National Chairman, in exposing the lies and historical falsifications about Trotsky by British historian Robert Service and other academics.

The meeting broke into applause when Dias announced that the SEP in Sri Lanka had published a Sinhala translation of North’s, *In Defence of Leon Trotsky*, for May Day 2012.

Dias also referred to the initiatives taken by the SEP after its founding congress last May, including its intervention into the lengthy strike by Maruthi Susuki auto workers in Haryana, India and its detailed political exposure through the WSWs of the 20th Congress of the Stalinist CPI-M (Communist Party of India-Marxist).

“The impact of the world economic crisis has been sharply felt in Sri Lanka,” Dias continued. “Under the dictates of the IMF, the government floated the rupee last November and within six months it has devalued by nearly 17 percent against the US dollar. The prices of essentials have gone up with new taxes even as a wage freeze is in place. Democratic rights are being hammered and a social counterrevolution is being unleashed against all sections of the masses.

“Under these conditions the ex-radicals of the NSSP

[Nava Sama Samaja Party] and the USP [United Socialist Party] are criminally promoting illusions in the right-wing UNP [United National Party] as a defender of democracy. This is the party that started the communal war in the North and is responsible for the massacre of tens of thousands of rural youth in the South,” he said.

Dias told the meeting that the pseudo-left NSSP and the USP had held a joint May Day rally in Colombo with the Frontline Socialist Party, a breakaway group from the Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. In Jaffna, the NSSP and USP had also organised a meeting with the UNP and the bourgeois Tamil National Alliance.

The speaker explained that these manoeuvres were aimed at blocking the development of a mass socialist movement of the working class. The purpose of these moves, Dias said, is to drown the working class in nationalism and cut them off from their international brothers.

“Only the SEP, which is based on a revolutionary perspective, fights for the interests of the working class and the oppressed through the overthrow of capitalist rule and the establishment of a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of a union of socialist republics of South Asia and internationally,” Dias concluded.

There was lively interest in the SEP’s literature stall at the meeting with sales totalling 18,000 rupees—the equivalent of two months’ wages for a Sri Lankan worker. The May Day audience also responded powerfully to a collection for the party fund, contributing over 17,000 rupees.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact