

Sri Lanka: Colombo public meeting hears US SEP presidential candidate

Our correspondents
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More than 200 workers, youth and professionals attended a public meeting in Colombo's New Town Hall yesterday to hear Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) US presidential candidate. White is visiting Sri Lanka as part of an international tour. He will also be addressing SEP and International Students for Social Equality meetings in Kegalla and Galle tomorrow and Thursday respectively.

The Colombo meeting included delegations from the northern Jaffna peninsula, plantation workers from the central hills, and students and youth from other parts of the island. A video journalist from Rupavahini, a national television station, recorded the event.

SEP general secretary Wije Dias, who chaired the meeting, introduced White and explained why the American SEP had decided to send its presidential candidate, just as the US election campaign was heating up. "The US SEP is intervening in the presidential elections to fight for alternative socialist policies and to lead the struggle to unify the working class on that program," he said.

Dias said the Rajapakse government's attacks on the jobs and living conditions of the working class and the oppressed masses in Sri Lanka, as dictated by the International Monetary Fund, would lead to an upsurge in the class struggle, in line with developments internationally. "Under these circumstances, the perspectives of the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, are decisive for the international working class and the oppressed masses," he said.

White began his speech, which was simultaneously

translated into Sinhala and Tamil, by emphasising that his tour was an essential part of the SEP's presidential election campaign, which was fighting for the unification of workers in the US and internationally on a socialist perspective.

Commenting on international and American political developments, White said: "Almost ten years after the Bush administration launched its military assault against Iraq, President Obama is repeating the same cynical claims as he threatens a US invasion of Syria. Such war would be expanded against Iran and carries with it [the danger of] a clash with nuclear-armed Russia and China."

White explained that Washington was provoking territorial disputes between China and US allies, Japan and the Philippines. "The 21 million people on the island of Sri Lanka are also being drawn into the geopolitical plans of the US to militarily encircle China."

"For the working class and oppressed masses of Asia the most critical ally in the struggle against American militarism and imperialism is the American working class," White said.

The financial crash that began in the US in 2008 with the collapse of Lehman Brothers had spread throughout the world, White explained.

The European bourgeoisie had no agreement on how to deal with the economic and political crisis, and the developing nations, including Brazil, China, India and Sri Lanka, were seeing a sharp fall-off in demand for exports, renewing the downward pressure on wages and the growth of unemployment, he noted.

"In the US, irrespective of whether President Obama or his Republican challenger Mitt Romney wins the November election, the corporate and financial elites are determined to strip away social rights of the working class," White explained.

White said these developments were “leading to a profound change in the political consciousness of American workers.” The SEP, he continued, was conducting its struggle in opposition to the pseudo-left organisations, which were attempting to keep the working class tied to the old trade unions and to Obama on the basis of racial and identity politics.

White emphasised: “For decades our movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, has fought to defend a revolutionary perspective for the international working class. Now we are on the eve of the most immense eruption of class struggle internationally and in particular by the American working class.

“As Trotsky explained in an earlier period of revolutionary struggle: ‘The task of the working class—in Europe and throughout the world—consists in counter-posing to the thoroughly thought-out counter-revolutionary strategy of the bourgeoisie, its own revolutionary strategy, likewise thought out to the end’.”

White concluded his speech by pointing out that this kind of revolutionary leadership required the building of the SEP in the US and internationally.

White’s speech was followed by an extended question-and-answer session. Audience members asked about the leadership of the Wisconsin protests and the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, the revolutionary character of America’s War of Independence and the Civil War, and how the SEP intended to change the capitalist system and face the counter-revolutionary strategy of the ruling class. White gave lengthy replies to these and other questions.

The meeting unanimously also passed a resolution calling on Wisconsin’s *Government Accountability Board* place the SEP candidates on the ballot for the November 6 US presidential election.

The resolution stated: “This meeting demands that all obstructions by state officials on the ballot status in Wisconsin for presidential candidate Jerry White and vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherer of the Socialist Equality Party, USA in the November elections, should cease.”

Over 14,000 rupees was donated to help promote White’s public meetings and the Sri Lankan SEP’s

intervention in the forthcoming provincial council elections. More than 10,000 rupees worth of literature, including many copies of *The Historical and International Foundations of Sri Lankan SEP*, were sold and the meeting concluded with the singing of “The Internationale.”



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