

# Sri Lankan SEP public meeting on Historical and International Foundations document

Our correspondents  
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) in Sri Lanka held a public lecture at the Public Library Auditorium in Colombo on November 8 to launch the publication of *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party–Sri Lanka*. The document was the main perspective resolution adopted at the founding congress of the SEP in May 2011. About 100 people attended the event.

Kapila Fernando, SEP political committee member and ISSE convener in Sri Lanka, chaired the meeting. He began by explaining the significance and political context in which other sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) had held their founding congresses.

“The US SEP held its congress just two months before the collapse of Lehman Brothers, a US financial giant, which signalled the current world economic collapse and contains international revolutionary implications,” he said. “Now, the global crisis of capitalism pushes mankind towards a world-scale conflagration. There is no national solution for this crisis. The working class, the ICFI insists, should adopt its own international socialist perspective and program.”

Wije Dias, SEP general secretary, delivered the main report and explained that the SEP’s founding documents were to prepare the working class to play the leading role in the unfolding social upheavals. This was necessary in advance of the outbreak of revolutionary struggles produced by the breakdown of capitalism.

The founding document of the SEP in the US, he said, is “an authentic chronology” of the central strategic issues that faced the international working class in the 20th century. “Our perspectives are based on the historical lessons of the struggles of international Marxist movement against the betrayals of social democracy, Stalinism and various centrist and petty-bourgeois tendencies.”

Dias explained how Leon Trotsky intervened as the capitalist crisis developed following the 1929 Wall Street crash. Trotsky was leading the Left Opposition to change the course of the Third International, which was dominated by the national opportunist policies of Stalinism. After Stalinism’s grotesque betrayal in Germany in 1933, Trotsky launched the struggle for the Fourth International. It was founded in 1938, one year before the World War II, to arm the working class in the imperialist and the colonial world with a socialist internationalist program to fight capitalist barbarism, the speaker said.

“Today we see the devastating consequences of the breakdown of capitalism, even graver than the 1930s depression,” Dias said. “The IMF and World Bank have been forced to lower their economic growth forecasts for every country. China and India, previously seen as engines of economic growth, have lowered their rates by more than 4 percentage points.”

Every government was adopting drastic austerity programs to destroy the social position of the working class, he continued, which would produce struggles by workers.

The revolutionary upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 had been followed by waves of strikes and street demonstrations by workers and youth in Europe and US. But these struggles, Dias said, “were pushed back because of the lack of revolutionary perspective and leadership. The massive strikes in India and the recent 100-day strike by the university teachers in Sri Lanka faced the same predicament.”

Stressing the importance of political preparedness, Dias said that following the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, the ruling class proclaimed the end of history and the demise of

socialism. “The ICFI was able to counter this triumphalism only because it was prepared beforehand by its political break from the opportunist renegades of British Workers’ Revolutionary Party in 1985-86.”

The speaker explained that the SEP’s *Historical and International Foundations* document provided the only true account of the key strategic experiences of the Sri Lankan working class during the last century. This is not found in the works of bourgeois academics, who reject the elementary truth that all history is the history of class struggle.

Dias said the document explained why the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, in contrast to the Indian capitalist class, had not demanded the independence from British rule. This was because the Sri Lankan capitalists confronted a large and organised working class, which they regarded as a bigger danger than the British colonial rulers.

This is why, Dias said, the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, when independence was thrust upon them, immediately moved with vengeance against the Tamil-speaking plantation workers. Only the Trotskyists of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) waged a principled struggle against those vicious attacks.

The struggle of the BLPI, as opposed to the national opportunist Lanka Sama Samaja Party, is discussed in the SEP document, along with the political back-sliding of that party in the 1950s, which culminated in the great betrayal of 1964 when the LSSP joined the capitalist government of Sirima Bandaranaike.

Those, including late comrade Keerthi Balasuriya, who initiated the establishment of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) in 1968 in collaboration with the ICFI, defended the program of Trotskyism. The establishment of the RCL was based on a thorough-going study of the historical legacy of Trotsky and the struggle of the ICFI against Pabloite opportunism.

These theoretical foundations, Dias continued, enabled the RCL to defend independent proletarian revolutionary positions in relation to the democratic rights of the oppressed Tamils and provide a socialist program for every struggle of the working class, not just in Sri Lanka but across South Asia during the last 44 years.

Every opportunist tendency fears its own history, Dias continued. Their policies are determined by pragmatic day-to-day considerations. This was typified in Sri Lanka by the

Nava Sama Samaja Party and United Socialist Party. “Previously they supported the Sri Lanka Freedom Party of Rajapakse to keep the United National Party (UNP) out. Today they are with the UNP against Rajapakse,” the speaker said.

Dias pointed out that these pseudo-left organisations were no different to their international co-thinkers, such as the International Socialist Organization in the US, the British Socialist Workers Party, the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France.

“By contrast, the SEP, which is based on firm principles consistently fights for the political independence of the working class, to rally the oppressed masses behind it and for the establishment of a workers’ and farmers’ government as part of the fight for the united socialist states of South Asia and internationally. This is the perspective fought for by the Fourth International based on Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution.

“The historical lessons contained in the SEP perspective document are an invaluable revolutionary guide for the working people, rural poor, youth and students of all communities in the struggles ahead that pose the issue of political power. The SEP must be built as a mass party of the working class to lead this struggle,” Dias said in conclusion.

Several workers and youth responded enthusiastically to the lecture and agreed to continue discussions about joining the SEP.



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