

Sri Lankan SEP holds May Day meeting

Our correspondents
9 May 2013

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a well-attended public meeting at the S. de S. Jayasinghe Hall in the Colombo suburb of Dehiwala on May 1. Workers, youth and professionals from Colombo and other areas of the island, including hill country plantations and the northern Jaffna peninsula, attended to mark the international workers' day.

K. Ratnayake, a member of the SEP Political Committee and *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board, opened the meeting by noting the contrast between its theme, "Fight for international socialism to defeat US imperialist war drive," and that of the various May Day rallies organised by pseudo-left and nationalist parties, all of which were committed to defending imperialism and the crisis-ridden capitalist system.

SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris explained that after invading Afghanistan and Iraq, US imperialism was now intervening in Syria and threatening Iran, while preparing for war against China. She explained that the SEP stood in the traditions of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India, the South Asian section of the Trotskyist Fourth International, which had waged a heroic struggle in the early 1940s to mobilise the working class against British imperialism during World War II.

Addressing the meeting in Tamil, SEP Political Committee member M. Thevarajah pointed out that the plantation trade unions had last month reached a regressive new wages agreement with the plantation companies, behind the backs of the workers. He also exposed the role of the Tamil bourgeois parties in the north of the country, including the Tamil National Alliance, which sought the intervention of the imperialist powers and the Indian bourgeoisie, on the pretext of ensuring the democratic rights of Tamil

people.

IYSSE convenor Kapila Fernando outlined the impact of the deepening economic crisis on workers and young people in Sri Lanka. Referring to a recent World Bank report, he noted that the official unemployment rate for those aged 20-25 had reached 8.5 percent. The figure for women was 17.5 percent. Fernando also spoke about the government's drive to privatise education, at students' expense. "Internationally, education is being increasingly transformed into a profit making industry and Sri Lanka is not exceptional," he explained. "The ministers in the government and their officials claim that education should be market-oriented."

The final speaker was SEP general secretary and WSWs International Editorial Board member, Wije Dias. He said: "US imperialism has already launched aggressive military interventions in many countries, like Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, and now threatens Syria, Iran and North Korea with similar interventions for regime change as part of its pursuit of domination over natural resources. With the Obama administration's declared policy of a 'pivot to Asia', this region, including Sri Lanka, is caught amid rising war tensions. The working class must be prepared with an alternative, the program of socialist internationalism, to counter this imperialist move being carried out with the backing of the national bourgeoisie in the countries of the region."

Dias explained that the Sri Lankan working class and poor had entered an era of struggle against the austerity measures of the government, which was following the dictates of the International Monetary Fund. He gave an account of different struggles by working people, youth and the oppressed masses against the attacks of President Mahinda Rajapakse's government. "The escalating protests against unbearable electricity tariff hikes coincide with the demonstrations of vegetable farmers who demand better prices for their products,"

he told the meeting. “The students continue to wage struggles against education cutbacks, while Tamil people in the country’s north engage in a fight against the appropriation of their lands by the military.”

Dias exposed the reactionary politics of the various pseudo-left parties, like the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), and the trade unions. “Their role—like that of their counterparts in Greece, Portugal, Spain and everywhere else—is to conceal the crucial political issue posed before the working class: the historical necessity to overthrow the moribund capitalist order,” he said. As defenders of capitalism, the “lefts” and trade unions were committed to concealing the systemic crisis of world capitalism that drove US imperialism toward aggressive neo-colonialism.

The SEP leader also explained that the pseudo-lefts in Sri Lanka had lined up behind the hypocritical US attempt to exploit the crimes committed by Rajapakse’s government during the war against the Tamil separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This campaign was designed to pressure Rajapakse to distance himself from Beijing and instead line up with the US “pivot” against China.

“In line with this pro-imperialist policy, the NSSP has formed a reactionary alliance with the traditional right-wing bourgeois UNP [United National Party],” Dias explained. “To justify this alliance, the NSSP argues that the demand for socialism is not relevant for today and struggles must be limited to democratic demands. This is the line propagated by the United Socialist Party and the Frontline Socialist Party as well. The sinister nature of this NSSP policy, claiming to advance a struggle for democracy by aligning with the UNP, is clear from the UNP’s record, including its launch of the civil war against the oppressed Tamils in 1983 and, during World War II, helping British imperialism imprison socialists and antiwar militants.”

Dias concluded by explaining that the only movement fighting to mobilise the international working class against the imperialist war drive was the International Committee of the Fourth International. The SEP, as its Sri Lankan section, strove to win the working class and youth in Sri Lanka and the South Asia region to the program of international socialism. After elaborating the SEP’s perspective of a United Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as a part of a Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia, Dias called on those in

attendance to join the SEP and help advance that struggle.



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