

Australian SEP election candidate addresses Colombo meeting

Our correspondents
16 August 2013

More than 100 workers, youth and housewives gathered at Colombo's New Town Hall yesterday to hear Socialist Equality Party (SEP) assistant national secretary James Cogan, one of ten SEP Senate candidates contesting the forthcoming Australian federal elections. SEP members and supporters from Jaffna and tea plantations in the central hills district also attended the meeting.

Cogan is visiting Sri Lanka to address public meetings organised by the SEP in Sri Lanka and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). He will participate in a press conference in Colombo today and another SEP public meeting in Galle tomorrow.

SEP political committee member Vilani Peiris chaired yesterday's meeting, which was also addressed by IYSSE convener Kapila Fernando and SEP political committee member K. Ratnayake. Cogan's speech was simultaneously translated into the Tamil and Sinhala languages.

Peiris welcomed Cogan on behalf of the SEP. She explained that the Australian SEP's election campaign was based on socialist internationalism and building an international movement of workers and youth against US preparations for war on China. She said the global protests that had erupted against the US war on Iraq in 2003 were derailed by the pseudo-lefts and ex-radical groups, which helped to tie the antiwar movement to the various bourgeois parties.

IYSSE convenor Kapila Fernando referred to the imperialist slaughter of millions in World Wars I and II and said a new world war would produce a far greater catastrophe for humanity. "Young people, who face increasing levels of unemployment, have no future under capitalism. Any future war will be a disaster for them," he said. World war could only be prevented, he

explained, by a movement of the international working class to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism.

Cogan, the main speaker, highlighted the significance of the principled, decades-long struggle for genuine Marxism by the Sri Lankan SEP and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League. "Its history and principles stand as an example for workers and young people around the world as to what it means to fight for the international unity of the working class and to uphold its independent interests," he told the meeting.

Elaborating on the world political and economic context in which the SEP's election campaign is being carried out, Cogan said: "After three decades of steadily growing contradictions within the world capitalist system, we are now living in the midst of a complete breakdown and a new period of profound economic and political instability."

The speaker explained that the SEP's intervention in the Australian elections was in order to "warn the working class of the dangers of war arising from the Obama administration's 'pivot' to Asia" and to puncture "the conspiracy of silence in the political establishment and the media" over the issue.

Cogan said the "historical decline in the economic position of American imperialism" was at the centre of the processes driving it toward war. Washington's war preparations against China and its mobilisation of support from its Asia-Pacific allies, he continued, was posing an enormous dilemma for them, particularly Australia, which has to choose between economic relations with China and strategic relations with the US.

Cogan explained that Kevin Rudd had been removed in June 2010 by an inner-Labor Party coup during his first term as Australian prime minister. He was replaced by his deputy, Julia Gillard, because Washington opposed Rudd's suggestions of a diplomatic

compromise with China to defuse growing tensions between China and the US. Under Gillard, Australia's armed forces were more closely integrated with the US military's war preparations against China.

"The Australian continent has been selected as a US base because of its proximity to the key sea lanes in South East Asia and where trade passes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans," Cogan said.

Explaining that military conflict between the major powers was the outcome of the irresolvable contradictions of capitalism, the speaker insisted that war was "not inevitable." He emphasised: "It can, and must, be prevented. The only social force that can prevent war, one which is more powerful than imperialism, is a unified revolutionary movement of the international working class."

Cogan concluded by thanking the Sri Lankan SEP for the opportunity to address the meeting and urging those in the audience to join the world party, the International Committee of the Fourth International.

SEP political committee member K. Ratnayake told the meeting that US imperialism's drive for global hegemony was the most destabilising factor in world politics, and he reviewed its impact on the Indian sub-continent. The Obama administration, he said, was seeking close relations with India as a counterweight to China. India, with Washington's backing, was now more assertive. Border tensions have again erupted between India and Pakistan, which could degenerate into a war with far-reaching consequences.

"The US is also exploiting war crimes carried out during the Sri Lankan military's offensive against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The Obama administration is demanding that Colombo distance itself from China," Ratnayake said. Washington had fully backed the war in Sri Lanka, he continued, but it was not ready to tolerate President Mahinda Rajapakse's balancing between China and US.

The speaker explained that the Rajapakse government was using the military methods developed during the war to suppress the emerging struggles of working people, in order to impose the burden of the economic crisis on the masses.

"A section of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, including the right-wing United National Party (UNP), is siding with the bogus US campaign on human rights," he said.

Ratnayake pointed out that "the pseudo-left Nava Sama Samaja Party and the United Socialist Party have lined up with the UNP and turned to the US imperialism."

A number of youth and workers remained behind after the meeting to meet Cogan and have further discussion about the issues raised by the speakers. Audience members donated 8,150 rupees for the SEP's provincial council election fund. The Sri Lankan SEP is running a slate of candidates in the northern provincial election to be held in September.



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