

Greetings to Australian congress from Sri Lankan SEP

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29 April 2014

Deepal Jayasekera, assistant national secretary of the SEP (Sri Lanka), delivered the following greetings to the Second National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), which was held in Sydney from April 18–21, 2014.

I am bringing the warmest revolutionary greetings to your party congress on behalf of the SEP in Sri Lanka. I am very happy to be here. The last time I joined you was in 2010, when I attended your founding congress.

The resolutions that have been prepared for this congress and the political discussions taking place here are important not only for the Australian SEP but for the ICFI as a whole, including the Sri Lankan SEP, as part of the essential political preparation of our international cadre for the revolutionary challenges ahead.

This congress is being held under conditions where the major imperialist powers, particularly the US and Germany, are recklessly driving mankind towards the disaster of another world war through the aggressive pursuit of their strategic interests. As the main congress resolution—“Australian imperialism and the Obama administration’s ‘pivot to Asia’”—declares, “The international working class is the only social force on the planet that can halt the US drive to war through the struggle to abolish the source of the conflict—the capitalist profit system and its outmoded division of the world into rival nation states.”

Along with Australia, the whole of South Asia, including Sri Lanka and India, is being dragged into the maelstrom of intensifying global geopolitical tensions as a consequence of US imperialism’s “pivot to Asia.”

The Obama administration is using the war crimes carried out by the Sri Lankan government of Mahinda Rajapakse and its military during the war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which ended in May 2009 with the military defeat of the LTTE, to pressure Rajapakse to turn away from his close relations with China and fully integrate into the “pivot.” As part of this effort, the US has repeatedly sponsored resolutions on Sri Lanka’s war crimes at sessions of the UN Human Rights Council.

In a clear shift by the US towards a more aggressive stance against the Rajapakse government, a US-sponsored resolution, passed at the UNHRC last March, called for an international investigation into human rights violations during the Colombo government’s war against the LTTE and related war crimes. Previous US resolutions passed at UNHRC sessions in 2012 and 2013 were limited to calling for the Rajapakse government itself to hold an investigation into its own human rights violations.

Despite its claims that the military carried out no atrocities or human rights abuses, the Rajapakse government certainly did commit war crimes and is continuing to attack the democratic rights of working people, Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim alike. Last week, the Sri Lankan military claimed that it had killed three alleged “LTTE leaders” in overnight skirmishes in a jungle in the northern Vavuniya district, declaring, without any evidence, that they were trying to revive the LTTE. Since March, the military has unleashed a campaign of terror and intimidation against

Tamils in the north, detaining over 60, including women, under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

However, the US and other western powers, including Britain, France and Germany, have no concerns about war crimes and other human rights violations. They all supported the government’s war against the LTTE and are responsible for their own war crimes. The real reason behind their pressure on Colombo is their concern, based on their own strategic interests, to distance the Rajapakse government from Beijing. The Obama administration aims to undermine China’s influence in Colombo, which has expanded as a result of Beijing’s military and economic support to the government during its war against the LTTE.

Rajapakse has responded by resorting to a chauvinist campaign, claiming that it has become the victim of a “western conspiracy” that has been influenced by remnants of the LTTE in the Tamil diaspora. So fearful is the government of antagonising the US and the other western powers, however, that it has never named these “western conspirators.”

The real goal of this bogus campaign is to divert the growing discontent of workers, the rural poor and youth with the government’s relentless assault on living conditions and democratic rights, as it seeks to implement the dictates of investors and the International Monetary Fund.

As in the case of Burma, if Rajapakse agrees to toe the US line and fully break his relationship with Beijing, the accusations will suddenly evaporate and his government will be hailed as one that is turning to democratic values and human rights.

Sections of the Sri Lankan ruling class are expressing dismay at Rajapakse’s lack of response. Their concerns about alienating the US have been expressed by the main opposition right-wing United National Party (UNP), which has demanded that the government implement its promises to the “international community,” giving a clear signal that it is ready to back US interests in the region.

The UNP is referring to demands from the US and others for the implementation of the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), which was appointed by the Rajapakse government to whitewash the military’s war crimes. The LLRC has made various cosmetic proposals, like disarming the Tamil paramilitary groups that have been working with the military, and carrying out a limited devolution of power. The government has refused to implement even these.

The Sri Lankan pseudo-left groups, such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the United Socialist Party (USP)—the Sri Lankan sections of the Pabloite United Secretariat and the Committee for a Workers International respectively—play a vicious role in preventing any independent political struggle by the working class against the Rajapakse government. The NSSP and USP have made an opportunist and reactionary alliance with the main opposition right-wing United National Party (UNP)—under various names like “Force for Unity” and “Protest of the Opposition”—in the name of fighting for democracy against Rajapakse’s dictatorial rule.

NSSP leader Wickramabahu Karunaratne praises UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe as a great liberal democrat, who can be relied upon to carry out the task of getting rid of the Rajapakse regime. Karunaratne has particularly promoted Wickremasinghe as a leader who can solve Sri Lanka's "ethnic problem," through a "political solution", i.e., "devolution of power." This is precisely what the US and other western powers, as well as India, are pushing for. Such a power-sharing arrangement will have nothing to do with the genuine democratic aspirations of the island's Tamils, who have been subjected to decades-long communal discrimination by successive Colombo governments, culminating in the more than quarter-century long racialist war. Moreover, Wickremasinghe's UNP initiated this war and prosecuted it in a no less ruthless manner than Rajapakse.

Karunaratne writes a regular column in the Sinhala weekly *Irida Lakkima*. In its April 6 edition he wrote:

"On the other hand, the UNP has developed as a protection centre for minority nations. It is not just a bourgeois liberal alternative. It is an interim place, which is oriented to the protection of oppressed nations. Since Ranil's party has developed as a protection place for Tamils and Muslims, his party can be pushed onto a rebellious path from the other side."

Like their pseudo-left counterparts in the US, Europe and Egypt, the NSSP and USP, through their alliance with the UNP, have lined up behind the US and other imperialist powers. Karunaratne has praised the US for pressuring Rajapakse to implement a power-sharing arrangement and carry out the recommendations of the LLRC. He seeks to hoodwink the working class by claiming that these are bona fide efforts being made by Washington on behalf of the oppressed Tamil population of Sri Lanka.

Likewise, the NSSP leader, in a more recent *Lakkima* column, tries to lull the working class to sleep by claiming there is no danger of another world war.

"This is not an era in which the various imperialist countries clash with each other and wage wars," he asserts. "We have reached an era in which the IMF/WB/WTO trio work to settle trade disputes between them."

Karunaratne makes this absurd claim as his party lines up behind Washington's aggressive intervention into Sri Lanka to push Colombo to support its "pivot" to Asia—that is, to support the US preparations for war with China.

The working class must politically and organisationally break from these various pseudo-left groups and fight for the development of its own independent political movement, rallying behind it the oppressed masses, including the rural poor.

The Socialist Equality Party fights to mobilise the working class against US imperialism's war drive. We call on workers and youth to reject the machinations of the US and its allies in Colombo and internationally, and, at the same time, to oppose the war crimes of both past and present Sri Lankan governments. With our sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International, including the Australian SEP, we are fighting to build an anti-war movement of the working class in Asia and internationally. This requires a struggle for the independent mobilisation of the workers of Sri Lanka, South Asia and around the world on the basis of a revolutionary socialist perspective. As part of that joint struggle, the Australian SEP's assistant national secretary, comrade James Cogan, one of the party's candidates in the 2013 Australian national elections, visited Sri Lanka last year and addressed public meetings organised by our party in Colombo and Galle, and also met and discussed with Free Trade Zone workers.

As part of its "pivot" to Asia, the Obama administration is working aggressively to develop a strategic partnership with India, as a counterweight to China. In June 2012, US defence secretary Leon Panetta declared in New Delhi that India would be "a linchpin" in America's unfolding new defence strategy in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Indian ruling elite has enthusiastically grabbed Washington's offer in both hands. While claiming to maintain "strategic autonomy", i.e., a precarious balancing act between its strategic partnership with Washington and its ties with China and Russia, New Delhi considers its strategic partnership with the US as the main pillar of the drive to become a global power. This balancing act is becoming increasingly untenable as global geo-political tensions grow.

In relation to the Ukraine crisis, India is desperately trying to maintain its "autonomy" in an effort to avoid damaging its relationship with either Washington or Moscow.

After maintaining a stony silence for nearly two weeks, even after the February 22 coup, India's External Affairs Ministry issued a statement, referring merely to a "change of government" in Ukraine and calling for "a legitimate democratic process" towards a solution "that meets the aspirations of all sections of Ukraine's population." There was no condemnation of the fascist-led US-backed coup in Kiev. At the same time, India insisted on Russia's "legitimate interests" in Ukraine.

While India, for its own strategic interests, wants a partnership with the US, it also wants to maintain its decades-long ties with Russia, formerly the Soviet Union. Moscow has been India's "all weather friend" and its main defence supplier. More than three-quarters of India's military imports over the past five years have come from Russia. And it was the Soviet Union and later Russia that stood by India when it was isolated by the US and other world powers, after testing nuclear weapons in 1974 and again in 1998.

On March 27, India abstained on a resolution at the UN General Assembly against the March 16 referendum in Crimea, in which the Crimean population voted for the republic's secession from Ukraine and its incorporation into Russia. India was acting on the basis of its own domestic interests. It faces several longstanding separatist movements in its north-eastern states, and particularly in Kashmir. Long ago, it rejected a UN resolution for a referendum in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, to determine its future. That is why New Delhi fears that any support it gives to a referendum in Crimea will legitimise the same demand in relation to Kashmir and India's northeast.

Washington's interventions into the South Asian region have encouraged India to take an increasingly aggressive stance in its disputes with Pakistan and also China. US moves for a civil nuclear deal with New Delhi have encouraged the Indian government to concentrate its domestic supply of nuclear fuel on the development of its weapons program, thus escalating the nuclear arms race in the region.

Through their various alliances and manoeuvres with the global powers, all the South Asian ruling elites are working to push the region into the vortex of ever-increasing war tensions.

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These developments strongly pose the struggle against the growing threat of imperialist war as an urgent task before the working people and oppressed masses in South Asia. The SEP in Sri Lanka will take the lead, in collaboration with the other sections of the ICFI, particularly the Australian SEP, in building an anti-war movement under the leadership of the working class in South Asia and internationally. This anti-war movement must be based upon the program and perspective of international socialism, to overthrow the crisis-ridden capitalist system, the root cause of imperialist war threat.

The only way out of the misery that millions suffer at the hands of the national bourgeois ruling classes in the region is through the independent mobilisation of the working class across all national borders, in a unified political movement to overthrow the arbitrary state structure of the region and replace it with a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia. The fight for socialist revolution in South Asia is part of the broader struggle for

socialism throughout the world.

In this struggle, the working class in the region must provide leadership to the poor peasants and other sections of the oppressed masses, by advancing a socialist program to mobilise them against the landlords and big business in the fight for workers' and peasants' governments that will replace the reactionary regimes of the national bourgeoisie.

To lead the working class in South Asia in the struggle for socialism, sections of the ICFI, the world party of socialist revolution, must be built throughout the region. The SEP in Sri Lanka will further develop its political and theoretical struggle among workers, young people, intellectuals and the oppressed masses in India and other countries in South Asia, with the aim of building new ICFI sections in the coming period.

In conclusion, I would like to bring to your attention the importance of educating "the most advanced, principled and self-sacrificing layers of workers and youth in the lessons of the strategic experiences of the international working class in the 20th century", as your first resolution has emphasised.

In line with this, the Sri Lankan SEP is preparing to hold meetings and publish a series of articles marking the 50th anniversary of the betrayal by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) in 1964, when it entered the bourgeois coalition government of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. We will be utilising the anniversary to elaborate the crucial political and theoretical lessons of the principled struggle waged by the ICFI and its Sri Lankan section, the RCL/SEP, against this betrayal.

The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka), the party's founding document, explains the significance of the 1964 betrayal.

"The entry of the LSSP into the government of Madame Sirima Bandaranaike in June 1964 was a watershed in the history of the Fourth International—for the first time a party claiming to be Trotskyist directly entered the service of the bourgeoisie. The political responsibility for the betrayal rested squarely with the United Secretariat (USec) and confirmed all of the SLL's warnings about the unprincipled reunification of the SWP with the Pabloites just a year before. The leader of the British SLL, Gerry Healy, explained that the LSSP's betrayal was 'the most complete example' of betrayal by Pablo, Mandel and Pierre Frank. 'These people must take responsibility, since they have been in constant communication with the LSSP in Ceylon, for the past 18 years. The answer [to the question of the LSSP's degeneration] lies not in Ceylon, but in an international study of the struggle against Pabloite revisionism. The real architects of the coalition reside in Paris.'"

The implications of the LSSP's betrayal were not limited to that tiny island. They were felt in India and throughout Asia.

In Ceylon, the LSSP's subordination of the political independence of the working class to the bourgeoisie, through its entry into the coalition government, deprived the working class from providing leadership to the oppressed layers of the country, especially the Sinhala rural peasant youth in the south and the Tamils in the north. This led to the emergence of petty bourgeois organisations among them, such as the JVP in the south and separatist organisations like the LTTE in the north. The LSSP's betrayal strengthened the hands of the ruling class in carrying out its anti-Tamil racial discrimination, which developed later into civil war in 1983.

The 1964 betrayal did not come out of the blue. It was the outcome of the LSSP's political backsliding and nationalist degeneration, which had been encouraged by the Pabloites. The Pabloite-led degeneration of the LSSP and destruction of the Trotskyist movement in India gave a virtual free hand to the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI), preventing the Trotskyist movement from intervening into the crisis of the CPI, following the 1961 Sino-Soviet split and the 1962 Indo-China war. This crisis led to the formation of the CPM in 1964, which claimed to oppose the "revisionist" CPI. Later, a faction of the CPM formed the Maoist

movement in India, the Naxalites. The LSSP's betrayal facilitated the unopposed development of these Stalinist and Maoist movements, providing a justification for their reactionary politics. And the LSSP's 1964 betrayal also strengthened the Maoist movement in the Philippines and Indonesia.

The Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) was founded as the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI in 1968, as a result of the principled struggle waged by the ICFI against the LSSP's betrayal. Gerry Healy, along with other leaders of the SLL, then the British section of the ICFI, made visits to Sri Lanka during the 1964 betrayal and in its aftermath, discussing the lessons of the historical struggle of the ICFI against Pabloite revisionism with those who split from the LSSP in opposition to its betrayal.

The Sri Lankan SEP, the successor of the RCL, embodies the entire historical tradition of Trotskyism, which is embodied in *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)*, unanimously adopted in the founding Congress of our party in 2011.



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