

Sri Lankan public meeting discusses significance of online May Day rally

Our reporters
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About 200 workers, students and housewives participated in a powerful May Day public lecture in Colombo on Thursday. The event was organised by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka, as part of its campaign for the *World Socialist Web Site's* International May Day rally tomorrow.

Thursday's meeting included residents from Colombo and suburbs, as well as Sri Lanka's war-torn Jaffna in the north, and the island's central hills and southern regions.

SEP and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) campaign teams distributed thousands of leaflets in the lead-up to the Colombo meeting. These included the statement "No to Imperialist War! Reclaim revolutionary traditions of the May Day!" by WSWs international editorial board chairman David North.

Chairing the meeting, SEP political committee member Vilani Peiris explained that it was part of the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) struggle to unite the international working class against imperialist war and the capitalist system. The Ukraine crisis, she said, had "brought the world to the brink of war between nuclear-armed powers and could rapidly develop into third world war."

Political committee member K. Ratnayake delivered the main report. He told the meeting that the ICFI was the only organisation holding a globally-coordinated online May Day event in 2014. This was not an accident, he said, because the ICFI was based on the principle of internationalism and fights for an internationalist orientation among all sections of the working class.

The US and German governments, he continued, deliberately provoked the crisis in Ukraine and were rapidly moving to encircle Russia. The US and its

allies, who wanted to reduce Russia to a semi-colonial position and exploit its vast resources, were provoking a major conflagration, which could lead to a disastrous third world war.

"The same threat is present in the Asia-Pacific region, where the US is recklessly increasing its provocations against China, encircling it militarily, as part of its 'pivot to Asia' policy," Ratnayake said.

The speaker warned about the role of the pseudo-left groups: "Like its international cohorts, the Sri Lankan pseudo-left, such as Nava Sama Samaja Party, is claiming that the contradictions between the imperialist powers have disappeared and that the threat of a war no longer exists. These groups are trying to lull the working class to sleep and will drive them to the imperialist slaughterhouse."

Ratnayake appealed to audience members to register for the International May Day rally, join the SEP and take forward the struggle to build a new revolutionary leadership in the international working class. The meeting concluded with the singing of the *Internationale*.

Several workers and youth registered for the online global event at a computer set up at the meeting. Others took information about how to attend the rally.

Deesara, from Colombo, told WSWs reporters that he had "learnt a lot about world political developments" at the meeting. "I knew about the intervention of US imperialism in the Middle East and the crisis in Ukraine but didn't understand the actual reasons behind these interventions. The online May Day rally is definitely a major step to unite the international working class and I've already registered for that," he said.

Sampath said he had not attended a May Day rally for 15 years. "I was inspired by May Day rallies during

my childhood, especially the great slogan that was chanted, ‘Workers of the world, unite !’ However, as I got older this slogan gradually disappeared from the May Day rallies. But entering the meeting hall today, I was very pleased to see the great ‘Workers of the world, unite!’ displayed in huge letters on the stage.

“Your International May Day leaflet says that you are trying to revive the historical traditions of the international working-class movement. The online rally is a strong bridge for that and I’ll definitely attend.”

Mary from Hatton, in the central hills, said a third world war would be “a disaster for humanity.” She commented that various political parties and trade unions in the plantation areas were dividing workers. “Nobody talks about this war danger. The SEP and WSWS are making an important effort to unite workers by organising the International May Day,” she said.

Jayaluxmy, also from Hatton, said: “On my way to the meeting I saw the Rajapakse government’s May Day demonstration. The slogan being shouted was ‘Defend the Mother Land.’ This is reactionary and against the unity of workers in every country. Under Rajapakse’s rule we are living in poverty. I agree that without overthrowing capitalism workers can’t win their rights. I’m looking forward to hearing the international leaders’ speeches [on May 4].”

Vadivel, from the tea plantations in Bandarawela, said the International May Day rally was “a very valuable thing.” The ICFI, he said, “was the only organisation discussing how the First World War occurred one hundred years ago. Workers can learn from the history. Other parties do not speak about how serious world developments are threatening a new war.”

Anjana, a student from Gampaha, about 25 kilometres northeast of Colombo, said it was “a great thing” to use modern technology to organise the International May Day event. “US imperialism and other governments around the world use this technology to promote war and for further exploitation of the working class,” he said, pointing to the National Security Agency’s global surveillance of telephone calls.

“Only the SEP has insisted that mankind once again confronts a world war and that this is driven by the crisis of the capitalist system. Sri Lanka, which is situated in a vital point in the conflict between world

powers, is already being dragged into this conflict. There is no way forward for the mankind under capitalism. We have to educate all youth around the world on this issue.”



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