

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) holds first national congress

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held its first national congress in Colombo over four days from March 27 to 30. The congress unanimously passed two important resolutions: “Socialism and fight against the imperialist war”—a resolution issued by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)—and “The political fight against the war and political tasks of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka).”

Delegates from across Sri Lanka attended the conference, including from the north of the island and the plantation areas. Representing the ICFI, leading members of Socialist Equality Parties in the US, Australia and Germany participated. Greetings were also presented from the SEP in the United Kingdom and Canada and the SEP supporters’ group in India.

Delivering the opening report, SEP general secretary Wije Dias began by emphasising the importance of placing the ICFI resolution issued on June 9 last year, “Socialism and fight against the imperialist war,” at the centre of the party’s political struggle. He quoted the resolution: “The danger of a new world war arises out of the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system—between the development of a global economy and its division into antagonistic nation states, in which the private ownership of the means of production is rooted. This finds its most acute expression in the drive of US imperialism to dominate the Eurasian landmass, above all those areas from which it was excluded for decades by the Russian and Chinese revolutions.”

Dias explained: “We arrived at this conclusion—to place the fight against war and for socialism at the centre of our political work—through closely studying and analysing the changes in world economy and politics for a long period of time. The founding congresses of SEPs were held internationally on the basis of documents extensively reviewing the historical and international foundation of these parties.”

The speaker referred to the Sri Lankan SEP’s 2011 founding conference document, which explained that the crisis of capitalism had propelled the US into a drive for global hegemony that threatened to drag humanity into another catastrophic world war. Turning to the consequences in South Asia, including Sri Lanka, Dias quoted: “Sri Lanka has been drawn into the vortex of this competition as a result of its central position astride the Indian Ocean’s major shipping lanes.”

Dias continued: “We developed our perspectives on the basis of this international and historical approach. US imperialism has intensified its interventions to control Russia and the Middle East

and to encircle China in the Asia Pacific region. Our analysis of the 2015 presidential election in Sri Lanka recognised the election as an important turning point in Washington’s intervention in this region. [Maithripala] Sirisena came forward to challenge [President Mahinda] Rajapakse in a regime-change operation orchestrated by the US, supported by India.”

The SEP general secretary noted that in the coming period the working class in Sri Lanka and throughout the region would face intensifying conflicts between the rival imperialist powers. However, the pseudo-lefts such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) were sowing illusions that imperialism had resolved its contradictions through the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation. They were seeking to disorient the working class by reviving Karl Kautsky’s theories of peaceful imperialism. In reality, any agreements between the imperialist powers were temporary and highly unstable. Differences arose recently between Germany and the US over Washington’s preparations for a confrontation with Russia. And, Germany, France and Britain recently ignored Washington and joined the China-initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Washington would not tolerate these moves, Dias warned. The US would not stop at regime-change in Sri Lanka. Sirisena’s government had expected it could easily obtain loans from the IMF and other agencies after the removal of Rajapakse’s regime. However, the IMF rejected the loan request and insisted that the government must impose budget deficit cuts, as previously stipulated. That meant that the government must intensify social counter-revolution against the working class.

International finance capital was also pressuring the Modi government in India to implement austerity measures, the speaker explained. The US was deepening its intervention in Pakistan and had taken Burma into its fold. Burma was now provoking communal clashes in areas bordering China. The post-war settlements imposed on the region in 1947–1948 were being completely shattered.

Dias insisted on the need to take every opportunity in the development of the class struggle in order to build the SEP in Sri Lanka. “We have to wage a determined struggle for Marxism,” he said. Fake lefts, including the NSSP, were busy organising new political traps for the working class. Its leader, Wickremabahu Karunaratne, now proposed an organisation in Sri Lanka along the lines of Syriza, which had betrayed the working class in Greece.

Drawing the lessons of the struggle waged by the Trotskyist

Bolshevik Leninist Party of India during the World War II, Dias emphasised that the SEP would take responsibility for establishing sections of the ICFI in the South Asian region, and particularly for building a party in India.

David North, the chairman of the international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the national chairman of the SEP (US), presented greetings to the congress. He emphasised the importance of the congress taking into serious consideration the global character of the capitalist crisis and the relationship between the developments taking place within Sri Lanka and the fundamental tendencies developing in capitalism on a world scale. “Those are questions that we are now facing in the midst of a global crisis that is without precedent since the eve of the First World War and the Second World War,” he explained.

Reviewing the reckless actions of US President Barack Obama and his imperialist allies, North said that their “ultimate consequences would be nuclear war and the annihilation of hundreds of millions of people. They are ruling on behalf of the extraordinary powerful financial elite who every day makes decisions that have catastrophic, fatal impacts upon the lives of countless millions of people. Our task is to mobilise great masses of people and the working class against them.”

North stated: “The situation, comrades, is extremely dangerous. It raises to the sharpest level the urgency of the development of the leadership of the working class. The contradictions that underlie the enormously intensifying geo-political tensions are the same contradictions driving the intensification of the class struggle on the international scale. The danger of international war among the imperialist powers can be prevented only by the development of the class war, the class struggle of the working class against the capitalist system on the international scale.

“The development of the class struggle is now creating the conditions for the growth of revolutionary leadership, but cannot by itself decide the question. The political work of our movement, its practical interventions, its political program, and its fight for theoretical clarification within the working class, its education of ever-expanding cadre of revolutionary workers, is the decisive historical issue.”

North said: “The coming to power of Syriza was hailed by pseudo-leftists in Greece and throughout the world as a great victory for the masses of Greece. We have been denounced as sectarians for refusing to join in this orgy of celebration and share with this ‘great experience.’ We insisted that our task was to warn the working class. We correctly rejected the betrayal of the Syriza.

“One last point on the question of experience. On the theoretical level, which has vast political implications, the Marxist concept of experience is entirely different from the opportunist pragmatic concept of experience. We seek to bring into the countless day-to-day experiences of workers, the accumulated historical wisdom of the Marxist movement, based on decades and centuries in revolutionary and counter-revolutionary experience.

“Trotsky was a man of history, the ICFI is the party of history and we do not simply have opinions about Syriza, about Obama, about Sirisena. We base our politics on historically derived objective experience. Comrades, we are living in a period in which history is making very sharp turns. We are aligning ourselves with

that historical movement, and that movement is going to transform our parties in relationship to broad masses of the working class.”

The congress devoted four days of intensive discussion to an examination of the international situation, particularly in relation to South Asia, and the political tasks of the party. Many of the congress delegates took part, drawing out the lessons of the experiences of the party’s protracted political struggles. The congress was conducted in three languages—Sinhala, Tamil and English.

The discussion focussed on the resolution, “The political fight against the war and political tasks of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)” which reviewed global geopolitical tensions and how they have been expressed in Asia. It warns that the US intervention in the Sri Lankan presidential election to remove Rajapakse and install Sirisena was sharp expression of the Obama administration’s increasing moves toward a confrontation with China.

The resolution explains that Washington views South Asia and the Indian Ocean as pivotal to its plans to isolate and encircle China, and subordinate India to its predatory agenda. The resolution warns that the US is seeking to harness India into a quadrilateral anti-China alliance led by Washington, together with Japan and Australia, and that this agenda is taking rapid strides under the Modi government in India.

The resolution cites the significance of the SEP’s presidential election campaign, which placed the struggle against war and social counterrevolution at its centre, against all the fake left groups that rallied behind Sirisena and the US-backed intervention in Sri Lanka under the false banner of reestablishing “democracy” and “good governance.”

The resolution emphasises the importance of the political and theoretical struggle against these pseudo-left tendencies, and the building of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality as part of developing ICFI sections in South Asia.

On the final day, the congress re-elected Wije Dias as the SEP general secretary, Deepal Jayasekera as assistant national secretary and K. Ratnayake as WSWs national editor. The resolution, “The political fight against the war and political tasks of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka),” will be published on the WSWs in coming days.



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