

SEP public meeting assesses political turmoil in Sri Lanka

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a successful public meeting at Colombo's Public Library Auditorium on June 17. It was the first in a series of meetings to discuss the acute political and economic crisis confronting the government of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and its underlying geo-political and economic causes. Further meetings are being held in Ambalangoda, Chilaw, Kandy and Jaffna.

The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government was brought to power in the presidential elections on January 8 via a US-sponsored regime-change operation supported by India. Hostile to the close ties that Sirisena's predecessor Mahinda Rajapakse developed with Beijing, Washington was determined to shift the country's foreign policy away from China and toward the US.

Amid intensifying US provocations against China in the South China Sea, and preparations for war against Beijing, Washington has aggressively moved to integrate Colombo into its strategic agenda. These mounting tensions, compounded by the deepening global economic downturn, are driving the turmoil wracking the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government and Sri Lanka's ruling elite as a whole.

Before the June 17 meeting, SEP and IYSSE members and supporters visited workplaces and housing areas in and around Colombo to campaign among workers, youths and housewives. The campaign teams discussed the political issues confronting the working class and outlined the socialist perspective advocated by the SEP.

Chairing the Colombo meeting, K. Ratnayake, a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board and the SEP political committee, pointed to the

instability of the political establishment. "The crisis facing the ruling class is so acute that what its representatives speak this month is completely different from what they spoke last month."

This confusion, expressed from the president down to the whole government, indicated a profound crisis, Ratnayake said. Explaining the government's line up behind Washington's geo-strategic agenda, Ratnayake noted the visit by US Secretary of State John Kerry to Colombo in early May and Sirisena's efforts to secure a visit by President Barack Obama.

The speaker referred to recent remarks by Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera in Colombo seeking to justify the realignment with US. Samaraweera declared: "Asia's rise has heralded the end of the post-Cold War unipolar world order. The United States will remain the preponderant power for the foreseeable future, but the balance of power is shifting in Asia's favour... In these fluid decades Sri Lanka will have no choice but to make strategic choices in her global positioning."

IYSSE convener Kapila Fernando referred to the growing social tensions within Sri Lanka. He told the meeting: "Despite the sharp divisions among various factions of the ruling class there is no fundamental difference among them over the austerity measures to be imposed on working class and oppressed masses."

Fernando pointed to the political issues confronting students. He said the pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), which claimed to break from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), continued the same Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist politics as the JVP.

"The FSP, which now controls the Inter University Students Federation, continues a separate organisation for Buddhist monk students, the Inter University Bhikshu (Buddhist Monk) Federation, and has launched a campaign to demand special status for Buddhist

monks students,” he noted. “Through that campaign they work to create confusion and divisions among students along communal lines and disorient the genuine opposition growing among students against the government.”

The main speaker, SEP general secretary Wije Dias, who is also a member of the WSWS International Editorial Board, told the meeting: “The political and economic crisis of the Sri Lankan ruling class is closely intertwined with the geo-political tensions developing in South Asia and internationally, and the growing crisis of the global economy.”

Imperialism was once again driving mankind toward the catastrophe of a world war, Dias warned. The Obama administration was determined to establish its hegemony over Eurasia. In line with that, it was intensifying its provocations against China as a part of its “pivot” to Asia.

“US imperialism is hypocritically trying to pose as the ‘defender of freedom of navigation’ in the South China Sea,” Dias commented. “The US is involved in provocations against China, using its allies like the Philippines, Vietnam and Japan, over China’s land reclamation activities in South China Sea,” he said, but remained silent over similar activities by its partners, Taiwan, Philippines and Vietnam.

Dias pointed out that the Sirisena government’s suspension of Colombo’s Port City project, a multi-billion dollar land reclamation investment project funded by China, was a clear line-up with the US moves against Beijing.

The speaker referred to the campaign launched by some parties in the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA), the former ruling coalition led by Rajapakse, and sections of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), to bring Rajapakse back to power as prime minister.

“The foremost political responsibility for paving the way for such a campaign lies with the pseudo-lefts of the Nava Sama Samaja Party, the United Socialist Party and the Frontline Socialist Party,” Dias said. “They tied the popular opposition against Rajapakse behind Sirisena, while waving red flags.” Only the SEP opposed both Sirisena and Rajapakse on the basis of an alternative socialist program in its election campaign.

Dias opposed the fraudulent efforts by sections of the ruling elite and its pseudo-left apologists to present the 19th and proposed 20th amendments to the constitution

as “democratic” moves. The amendments supposedly curtail presidential powers and make electoral reforms. Dias exposed claims that the 19th amendment had cut the wings of the executive presidency. He warned: “None of these measures will bring democracy for the masses.”

The speaker said the SEP strongly advocated an independent intervention by the working class into the political crisis, based on a socialist program and perspective. “The working class must come forward, rallying other oppressed sections behind it, and form a workers’ and peasants’ government in the form of a United Socialist Republic in Sri Lanka to implement socialist policies,” Dias concluded.

“This is a part of a broader struggle for a Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally. In that struggle, the international working class has to cut across all the ethnic, religious and other differences whipped up by the ruling class.”



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