

Sri Lankan SEP General Secretary Wije Dias interviewed on national election channel

Our correspondent
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) general secretary Wije Dias was interviewed this week about the party's general election campaign on the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). The hour-long and wide-ranging discussion on the state-owned radio network, which has island-wide coverage, was broadcast live at 7 a.m. on July 26.

The SEP is standing 43 candidates in three key electoral districts—the capital Colombo, Jaffna in the war-torn north, and Nuwara Eliya in the centre of the country's extensive tea plantations.

Dias began the interview by explaining that the SEP was the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International and fights for the program of international socialism. The party was founded as the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) in 1968 following the betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which joined the bourgeois government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964. The RCL was transformed into the SEP in 1996, Dias said.

SLBC interviewer Shantha Kumara Liyanage said that Sri Lanka's official title was the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and asked, "Isn't Sri Lanka already a socialist country?"

Dias replied: "The ruling class never tells the masses the truth. This is only one such instance. When the pro-imperialist United National Party (UNP) leader J.R. Jayawardene initiated his autocratic executive presidential constitution in 1978 he tried to confuse the working class by declaring the island a socialist republic. His abuse of the word 'socialist' was assisted by the treacherous role played by the LSSP and the Stalinist Communist Party, which held cabinet posts in the capitalist coalition government of 1970–76. A measure of the mass hatred against these socialist pretenders was indicated by their defeat in the 1977

general election. They lost all their parliamentary seats and in some cases seats they had held continuously for over 40 years.

Liyanage asked why the "socialist" policies of the 1970 United Front government, which claimed to have established a self-reliant national economy, were rejected by the people in 1977 and resulted in the UNP winning a large parliamentary majority?

Dias pointed out that the 1970 government was not socialist but a capitalist regime headed by the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The LSSP and CP leaders who joined the regime were servants of the capitalist class. Capitalist rule in Sri Lanka, he continued, had faced a deepening economic and political crisis since the early 1960s. The "left" leaders joined the capitalist government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964 in order to head off a rising wave of working class struggles. This paved the way for the right-wing UNP government of 1965–70.

"By the time the second coalition government came to power in 1970, the crisis of world capitalism had further deepened. This was indicated by the de-linking of dollar-gold relationship, a cornerstone of the post-World War II world economic order. The floating of the dollar, in August 1971, led immediately to the devaluation of a series of major world currencies and was followed by commodity price increases, particularly of oil, which had a drastic impact on the Sri Lankan economy. This development starkly revealed the domination of the world economy over every country.

"The policies of the so-called People's Front government were bourgeois-nationalist and a desperate attempt to ward off the world capitalist crisis. Policies such as the prohibition of serving rice, the staple food, anywhere in the country on Tuesdays and Fridays to

save foreign exchange by reducing rice imports, were deeply unpopular. This situation was exploited by the UNP to come to power in 1977 and further integrate the island into the global capitalist economy,” Dias said.

The SEP general secretary went on to explain the origins of the global financial crisis in 2008 and the protracted breakdown of the world capitalist system now underway.

“The whole world capitalist system is engulfed by economic turmoil which is sharpening imperialist rivalries and the danger of all-out imperialist war. Sri Lanka is caught up in this whirlpool. This was shown in the last presidential election where Washington was actively involved in the regime-change operation that replaced Mahinda Rajapakse with Maithripala Sirisena as president.

“This was part of Washington’s ‘pivot to Asia’ policy to encircle China and end the relations Rajapakse developed with Beijing during his communal war and its aftermath. The US wanted Colombo to follow its strategic line of a military offensive against China, which it considers as a rival.”

A listener from Dalugama, which is on the outskirts of Colombo, phoned the radio station to ask Dias the following question: “Even though the Rajapakse government was leaning towards China, weren’t its economic policies pro-imperialist? Isn’t socialist China following the Western model of development?”

Dias gave a detailed answer: “China is not a socialist country. It rulers based themselves on the anti-Marxist nationalist program of Stalinism—the theory of ‘socialism in one country.’ Trotsky and the Left Opposition, backed by a powerful section of the Soviet working class, waged a determined struggle against this nationalist theory when it was first introduced in the Soviet Union around 1923. Trotsky formed the Fourth International in 1938 to fight against the counter-revolutionary Stalinist program on a world scale. That is the heritage of the SEP.

“The Stalinist bureaucracy that came to power after the 1949 Chinese Revolution rejected socialist internationalism and succumbed to the pressures of imperialism during 1970s. By the end of that decade they introduced the notorious program of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics,’ which meant nothing less than integration with world capitalism.

“In the same way that China is not a socialist country,

Rajapakse’s relations with China do not make him anti-imperialist. Both sides of this relationship are self-serving and opportunist. US imperialism, however, in its desperate moves towards world domination, is not prepared to tolerate Rajapakse’s relations with China, which Washington intends to re-colonise. This is why the US worked for Rajapakse’s removal from office.”

SLBC interviewer Shantha Kumara Liyange asked Dias whether the SEP would use any position it won in parliament to help one of the two main parties to form government?

“We intend to use the parliament only as another platform to educate the working class and the oppressed about our program for the overthrow of capitalist rule through a socialist revolution. There can be no parliamentary road to socialism, Dias said.

“Those who promote this policy pave the way for the sort of capitalist dictatorship imposed on Chile in 1973. It is also proven in Sri Lanka by the betrayals of LSSP and CP who opened the door for the right-wing UNP. This same fallacy is now being promoted by pseudo-lefts groups such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party, the United Socialist Party and the Frontline Socialist Party.

“The LSSP and CP have joined with Rajapakse, who continues to whip up communalism, while the pseudo-lefts, who helped Sirisena become president, are backing the UNP in the general election.

“In opposition to both capitalist camps and their hangers on, the SEP calls on workers and the oppressed of all communities to support our campaign and our fight for a workers’ and peasants’ government to abolish capitalism and implement a program of international socialism. This is the necessary first step the Sri Lankan people must take to stop the preparations for imperialist war and to defend social and democratic rights.”



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