

Paris public meeting discusses world significance of Sri Lankan elections

Our reporters
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On Saturday, supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) held a well-attended public meeting in Paris on the international significance of the Socialist Equality Party's campaign in today's Sri Lankan general election.

SEP (Sri Lanka) General Secretary Wije Dias and SEP lead candidates M. Thevarajah and Paramu Thirugnanasampanthar for the Nuwara Eliya and Jaffna district, respectively, delivered speeches from Colombo via remote connection. ICFI supporter V. Gnana spoke in Paris. The meeting was attended by workers and youth, both Tamil and European, as well as their families. Workers from several European cities listened to the meeting via Skype.

The speakers explained that the SEP is the only party advancing a revolutionary socialist program to unify Sinhala and Tamil workers in a struggle against the major bourgeois parties, Tamil nationalist groups, and pseudo-left organisations.

Opening his remarks, Dias noted that the SEP (Sri Lanka) was alone in mounting an international campaign, seeking to use the elections to raise the political consciousness of workers in Europe even if they would not vote in the elections.

Dias pointed to broad public disillusionment with President Maithripala Sirisena, who came to power in the January 8 elections, as part of a US-orchestrated regime-change operation to oust incumbent President Mahinda Rajapakse, who Washington saw as too closely tied to China. Having promised democratic reforms, Sirisena undemocratically made the right-wing United National Party's (UNP) Ranil Wickremesinghe prime minister of a minority government. In power, he has unleashed a series of attacks on social and democratic rights.

In the north of the country, many Tamils are still living in shelters or detention camps since the government in Colombo massacred the Tamil nationalist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and ended the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009. Defense Minister Ruwan Wijewardene is calling for stepped-up police powers and tightening "law and order" in the north.

Attacking the reactionary role of pseudo-left parties like the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), United Socialist Party (USP), and Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), Dias said: "They are seeking to rescue the crisis-stricken government of Sirisena and support the right-wing, pro-US United National Party [UNP] in the election."

Dias cited the comment of NSSP leader Wickramabahu Karunaratne who, asked why he was running an independent campaign after endorsing the UNP, replied: "I'm still providing support, and I am still supporting him, even in the election, I work together with him."

Thevarajah noted rising interest among workers, youths and oppressed people in discussing the SEP's program. He said the SEP was discussing the major international experiences of the working class, such as the 2011 revolutionary uprisings in Egypt and the role of the pseudo-left Syriza government in imposing savage austerity measures in Greece.

He described the SEP's intervention in the struggles of tea plantation workers against victimisation by management and the unions in the Nuwara Eliya district. The SEP has continuously exposed the Ceylon Workers Congress union, the Upcountry People's Front and other pro-capitalist organisations that oppose workers' struggles and supported the civil war.

Thirugnanasampanthar stressed that escalating

geostrategic tensions in the Indian Ocean around Sri Lanka, as Washington seeks to isolate and prepare for war with China, are driving social tensions and the divisions between the bourgeois parties. He described how, six years after the end of the civil war, masses of Tamils are still living in detention camps or makeshift shelters in appalling conditions.

He explained that Tamil nationalist parties such as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) are nevertheless supporting the US-backed Sirisena government. “While whipping up Tamil communalism, these parties are trying to secure the privileges of the Tamil bourgeoisie by accommodating with the Colombo political establishment in the name of a power-sharing arrangement,” he said.

From Paris, V. Gnana stressed the unviability of the perspective of Tamil nationalism and the correctness of the ICFI’s struggle against bankrupt Tamil petty-bourgeois movements, including the LTTE. In an earlier period, he said, these movements used left phraseology in their programs, including calls for “a socialist Tamil Eelam,” “class struggle,” or “anti-imperialist struggle.”

Following the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR, V. Gnana explained, the LTTE and other groups were “unable to manoeuvre between Moscow and Washington [and]... abandoned their ‘socialist’ phraseology and anti-imperialist pretensions and started to compete for support from Washington or other imperialist powers. “ They thus finished the process of being “transformed into the oppressors of the same people.” When the ICFI relentlessly exposed their bankrupt politics, these groups slandered the ICFI as agents of US imperialism, he noted.

V. Gnana stressed that the perspective of the ICFI has been thoroughly confirmed by events, and that “our perspective has broad political influence among Tamil workers and youth in Europe.”

The meeting underscores the growing interest among Tamil immigrant workers and the workers in Europe more broadly in the ICFI’s struggle against pseudo-left politics and petty-bourgeois nationalism.

The attendees responded warmly to the speeches, raising further questions on the program and the perspective of the SEP. In Paris, several workers stayed for discussion well after the end of the Skype portion of the meeting.

A worker who had been sympathetic to the LTTE before leaving Sri Lanka for France, bought a copy of *The Historical and International Foundations of the SEP (Sri Lanka)*, and several attendees at the meeting purchased David North’s recently published book, *The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism, and the Politics of the Pseudo-Left: A Marxist Critique*.



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