Sri Lankan SEP holds successful May Day meeting in Colombo

Our reporters
12 May 2016

On May 1, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka hosted a well-attended May Day meeting at the New Town Hall in Colombo. More than 200 workers, housewives, students and rural youth participated, including strong contingents of Tamil-speaking workers from the central plantation districts and Jaffna in the north.

The meeting was organised in conjunction with the International May Day online rally held later, at 10.30 p.m. Sri Lankan time. Many of those at the Colombo meeting participated in the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) online event.

SEP and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) supporters vigorously campaigned in working-class neighbourhoods and at universities to build the May Day events. Hundreds of copies of *Socialism against Imperialism and War* were sold on the campaigns.

SEP political committee member Vilani Peiris, who chaired the Colombo meeting, explained that US imperialism, beginning with the first Gulf War in 1991, had been involved in two and a half decades of military aggression—in the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and the Balkans. She warned that the US was rapidly preparing for the war against China and attempting to rally the whole South Asian region behind it.

"At every stopover during his recent Asian tour, US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter insisted on the need to militarily prepare against China and Russia," Peiris said. The speaker explained that the Chinese and Russian ruling elites had no progressive solution to this aggression but sought to whip up nationalism and chauvinism.

IYSSE convenor and SEP political committee member Kapila Fernando told the meeting that US imperialism began stepping up its global military operations after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. He said Washington was using so-called "freedom of navigation" and conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea to both increase tensions between regional powers and legitimise provocations against China.

Fernando reviewed the situation facing youth internationally, with particular reference to Sri Lanka, where youth joblessness was rapidly climbing and 54 percent of the workforce was employed on temporary contracts. He said the struggle against war, unemployment and poverty could be taken forward only by an internationally unified socialist movement of workers and youth against the capitalist system.

SEP general secretary and WSWS international editorial board member Wije Dias delivered the main speech to the Colombo meeting. He said the campaign for May Day was part of the work conducted by the ICFI around the world to build a global movement of workers and youth against imperialist war. (Dias's address to the ICFI's online rally several hours later can be heard here.)

Dias told the Colombo meeting that every South Asian and South East Asian country was being drawn into the maelstrom of US imperialist operations to economically undermine and militarily encircle China. He warned of the political dangers facing the Asian and international working class.

"Washington is intervening in every South Asian country—from the island states of Maldives and Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean to all of the Indian sub-continent itself—to make them toe the US's strategic line," he said.

Dias reviewed Washington's involvement in the regime-change operation in Sri Lanka against the former Rajapakse government, which was oriented

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towards Beijing, and the installation of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government.

"What these developments expose is the urgent need to undertake the building of a genuine anti-war movement in the region as part of the world movement of the working class to stop a Third World War," he said.

"Such a movement must be guided by the theory of Permanent Revolution because imperialist aggression for the re-colonisation of the world is based not only on the military strength of the aggressor but on the slavish support of the national bourgeois regimes in the under-developed world," Dias explained.

"The struggle to mobilise the independent strength of the working class for the replacement of these reactionary rulers with workers' and peasants' governments, committed to socialist policies, is an indivisible component of the struggle to stop the war."

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WSWS reporters spoke with two participants in the Colombo meeting and the May Day online rally.

Hasantha, a non-governmental organisation worker in Colombo, said: "The imperialists' drive toward another world war is something everyone in the world should be concerned about, because this will be fought with nuclear weapons. Such a war will destroy all that men have built up over thousands and thousands of years. By this I mean all human culture. And the speakers in the meeting clearly explained that the capitalist rulers in countries like Russia or China cannot stop the drive to war.

"Your meeting also pointed out how interconnected the capitalist financial system is. The capitalist rulers in India are working as instruments of the big imperialists powers such as the USA. They tie the people to the military machines of imperialism.

"It is important to know that the workers' struggles in a small country like Sri Lanka are part of the struggles of the world working class. That is the way in which workers can grasp the perspective of world socialist revolution that you explain."

Pavara, a university student, said: "The International May Day rally was a really important event and I was particularly impressed by how the speakers addressed workers all over the world.

"No other May Day rallies are able to speak in this way. The meeting also provided a clear-cut explanation on how a threat of world scale emerges out of the contradictions of the capitalist system itself. It not only explained this scientifically but presented a program for working people to overcome the challenges they face.

"I'd previously read your material and discussed it with your members but what made it possible for me to distinguish your organisation from the outfits talking pseudo-socialism—like the JVP [Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna] and others—is the way in which you explain the real global issues.

"I understand that the only viable way for us to go forward is fighting for international socialism. Pseudo-left parties and the JVP knowingly confuse young people and so your struggle is of paramount importance. I would like to discuss this more with you and to join your party."

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