SEP meeting in Colombo discusses Trump's election

Our correspondents
6 December 2016

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a successful public meeting in Colombo's New Town Hall on November 30 to explain the international implications of Donald Trump's election as the president of the United States. The meeting was attended by workers, students and housewives.

Leading up to the meeting, SEP and IYSSE members and supporters conducted a campaign in Colombo and its suburbs and universities. Discussions were held with students and workers and hundreds of copies of *World Socialist Web Site* articles were distributed on the US presidential elections in three languages, English, Tamil and Sinhala.

Sri Lanka's ruling elite, including President Maithripala Sirisena, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and former President Mahinda Rajapakse, had quickly welcomed Trump's win and appealed for his support.

Chairing the meeting, K. Ratnayake, national editor of the WSWS, explained that Trump's election was not an accident but was a product of 25 years of war, erosion of democracy and deepening social inequality in the US. Only the SEP's sister party in the US had warned of the dangers before the working class and fought to mobilise it independently of every section of the bourgeoisie, including the Democratic Party, on the basis of an international socialist program, he said.

Turning to South Asia, Ratnayake warned that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in India had indicated it would strengthen its strategic partnership with Washington, developed during the Obama administration, to a new height under Trump, targeting China and Pakistan. Sri Lankan President Sirisena had declared he would write to Trump urging him to free Sri Lanka from war crime charges, which the Obama administration had already diluted, in return for Sirisena reversing the previous Rajapakse government's close relations with China.

Prageeth Aravinda, speaking on behalf of IYSSE, said many students generally understood the right-wing character of Trump, the reactionary character of his politics, and the gathering war danger. However, leaders of the Inter University Student Federation (IUSF), which is controlled by the pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party, were also aligning themselves with Trump. A Buddhist monk in the IUSF leadership had backed Trump's nationalist policies, saying Sri Lanka was facing a threat from Islamists. "This is chauvinist propaganda to divide the working class," Aravinda said.

Delivering the main report, Wije Dias, SEP general secretary, emphasised the method of analysis that the Trotskyists of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) had applied to the protracted political process that produced Trump's election.

"It is necessary to place any political or other phenomenon within the relevant context in order to make a proper analysis or assessment of it," he said. "If we do not go by this rule in understanding the election of Donald Trump as US president it could lead to wrong conclusions that would place the emphasis solely on the supposedly peculiar evil nature of Trump's personality …

"Two fundamental factors in this process of contemporary world politics were identified by the International Committee about 25 years ago when the first signs of the cracks of the post-war world order emerged in the form of the collapse of the autarchic Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, and finally in the Soviet Union, one after the other, as a pack of cards. Our world movement recognised these events as the beginning of the breakdown of the post-war political settlement reached between the counter-revolutionary Moscow bureaucracy and imperialist leaders.

"At the same time, we drew the attention to the explosive contradiction that existed between the massive

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military strength of US imperialism and the loss of its dominant economic and political position in the world."

Outside this historical context, Dias said, it was impossible to make a valid evaluation of the emergence of Trump, who would pursue a militarist strategy to seek world hegemony for the US ruling class.

The Democratic Party and all the pseudo-left tendencies that gravitate around it had grotesquely cheated the working people and youth of the US, Dias explained. All these forces brought forward Barack Obama as a candidate of "change" to exploit the public hatred of the previous Bush administration's imperialist war agenda. What Obama delivered instead was the extension of US military aggression that Bush initiated. Simultaneously, Obama carried out severe attacks against the social and democratic rights of the American working class and youth.

Added to this massive political fraud was the presentation of Bernie Sanders as an alternative "democratic socialist" candidate for the Democratic Party presidential nomination. After more than 13 million people voted for him during the nomination contest, he unashamedly capitulated before Hillary Clinton.

"The political frustration and confusion created by these events played into the hands of Trump," Dias said. "Only the US SEP and its sister parties around the world tirelessly exposed the bogus progressive postures of the Democratic Party candidates and opposed the calls to support Clinton as a 'lesser evil'."

Now Trump is organising his cabinet team, recruiting notoriously right-wing and war-mongering individuals into it. The Democratic Party has shown its total readiness to work with Trump and his agenda of militarism and social counter-revolution.

Examining the response of Sri Lanka's ruling circles, Dias explained: "Both President Maithreepala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe immediately joined other rulers in congratulating Trump. They are showing the craven slavishness of the national bourgeois leaders before the dominant imperialist masters, on whose support the sustenance of their discredited rule ultimately depends."

Pseudo-left elements had readily come forward to provide legitimacy for these appeals by the capitalist rulers to Trump. Dias cited a column in the *Sunday Island* by one such unrepentant opportunist, Kumar David, in which he presented Trump in the mildest colours possible and even suggested that the president-elect could create a beneficial "new global currency order." The aim of such opportunists was to lull the working class to sleep "in front of the unprecedented threat posed to the world humanity by the strategic shift of the US ruling elite on the path of world war."

In conclusion, Dias appealed to the audience to join the SEP's political struggle to forge the revolutionary leadership of the working class in Sri Lanka and South Asia as part of the fight to build the ICFI as the world party of socialist revolution.

A female engineer who participated in the meeting said Trump posed "the biggest threat to the world since the Second World War." She said the SEP should hold meetings other places too. "The new generation has not experienced a world war. We've seen wars, but we can imagine how disastrous a war of this magnitude would be. The history of the world wars is either not taught at all in schools or just brushed away as something unimportant."

The engineer said the speakers explained the economic background of the war drive. "As workers in the private sector we have seen the economic downturn in Sri Lanka from 2013-14, but most of us think of it as a local problem, not the result of a world economic crisis."

Ratnaweera, a government worker from Matara, said: "I was searching for an objective analysis of Trump's election and its global implications. Since I have learned a lot from the speeches, I think that my long journey from Matara is not wasted.

"While the pseudo-left organisations presented Hillary Clinton as a 'lesser evil,' she was preparing to escalate the military interventions against China and Russia, which could ignite a world war."

Ratnaweera warned that the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government was fully aligned with the Obama administration and was ready to serve Trump.

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