

SEP Sri Lankan May Day meeting discusses threat of world war and lessons of Russian Revolution

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a well-attended meeting to mark May Day in Colombo on May 1. The meeting was held after the successful online May Day rally organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) through the *World Socialist Web Site*.

In preparation for the meeting, SEP members and supporters campaigned at universities in Colombo, workplaces and in working-class neighbourhoods. Nearly 200 workers, youth and housewives participated in the meeting and SEP members and supporters in Jaffna listened to the meeting online.

K. Ratnayake, the WSWS national editor, welcomed the audience and extended greetings to the other sections of the ICFI. He explained that the central theme of the Colombo meeting and the ICFI's online May Day was the struggle to mobilise the working class on the basis of socialist internationalism against the danger of a Third World War.

Ratnayake explained that under US President Donald Trump, war tensions had reached a qualitative new stage after a quarter century of American wars that intensified under Barack Obama. He pointed to the US cruise missile attack on a Syrian airbase, the dropping of the largest conventional bomb in the world on eastern Afghanistan and the tense US confrontation with North Korea. "The real targets, however, are China and Russia, in order to assert the hegemonic position over the world by the US," the speaker said.

Kapila Fernando, the IYSSE convener, explained that the ICFI's analysis of the global economic crisis and the drive by imperialist powers to war had been thoroughly vindicated. He warned that nationalism, protectionism and chauvinism were being promoted in preparation for war and to gag the working class.

Turning to the role of the pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) and its Inter University Students' Federation (IUSF), Fernando said: "The policies of the Sri Lankan capitalist class and the government have been determined by the international crisis. However, the thoroughly nationalist FSP and IUSF ignore this crisis and trap students and youth by appealing to the government and thereby politically disarming them."

M. Thevarajah, an SEP Political Committee member, pointed to the explosive political developments in France, where, in the first round of the presidential election, the traditional Socialist and Republican parties collapsed. "The neo-fascist Le Pen and the banker Macron are running in the second round. Opposition is developing among the masses, particularly among youth," he explained.

"Our young French section, the Socialist Equality Party, has launched a powerful campaign for an active boycott of this election in its fight for the political independence of the working class and to build a new revolutionary leadership. This struggle has lessons for workers and youth in every country."

Thevarajah pointed out the degeneration of Sri Lanka's Tamil bourgeois parties, which are serving the interests of American imperialism and the pro-US government in Colombo. "Struggles are developing in the war-ravaged north and east and in the south, but the urgent need is building the revolutionary party," he emphasised.

Vilani Peiris, also an SEP Political Committee member, highlighted the recent fatal tragedy involving the collapse of a garbage dump at Meethotamulla on the outskirts of Colombo to explain how the gutting down of social services was creating disastrous conditions for working people.

She said that 30 bodies had been found, including women and children, more people were feared dead and around 1,000 people were homeless. "As they do in other struggles of workers and students, the FSP organised protests to demand solutions from the very government that is slashing social services. People in many areas in and around Colombo came out to protest against this tragedy showing they are not ready to accept these conditions.

"Preparations for war and attacks on social and democratic rights are the two sides of the same coin. These attacks are being unleashed in every country. The only alternative to war and social counterrevolution is the fight for international socialism."

Peiris announced that the SEP will launch a workers' inquiry into the disaster to expose the role of government, companies and profit system in creating the conditions for it to occur.

Wije Dias, the SEP general secretary, was the main speaker. He began by pointing to the historic decision taken by the Second International in 1889 to designate May Day as a day of solidarity of the international workers' movement. It anticipated the international revolutionary insurrection of the proletariat, which was required 25 years later, when the contradictions of world capitalism exploded in the form of World War I in August 1914.

"Only the Bolshevik Party unwaveringly adhered to the internationalist principles adopted at the world congresses of the Second International, between 1908 and 1912, against the imperialist war and called on the working class to adopt the policy of revolutionary defeatism and turn the imperialist war into civil war," Dias said. That was why the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky were able to lead Russian workers to overthrow the capitalist government and establish workers' power in Russia in October 1917 at the head of the multimillioned peasantry.

"Herein lies the historic importance of the online International May Day held by the ICFI, using Internet technology, to build a strong unified international movement of the working class on the unshaken foundation of a socialist program against imperialist war and authoritarianism."

After explaining that the ruling elites in all the major capitalist countries were adopting protectionist policies and waging social counterrevolution, Dias turned to South Asia—India and Sri Lanka in particular. He said that rapid changes in interstate relations and the form of rule within the countries were taking place under conditions of an aggressive US intervention that has intensified under the Trump presidency.

"The Hindu chauvinist government of Narendra Modi in India has, without hesitation, embraced the US as a 'major defence partner.' As the main policeman of the region, Modi's rule, on behalf of the US imperialist master, had now assumed the role of dictating political terms to neighbouring states."

In 2014-15, India helped the US in its regime-change operation in Sri Lanka to oust Mahinda Rajapakse as president, due to his close relations with China, and install Maithripala Sirisena, who shifted foreign policy toward Washington, Dias said. New Delhi coerced Nepal to distance itself from China. Moreover, India's aggressiveness, abetted by the US, toward Pakistan threatened a nuclear war that could potentially bring major powers into conflict.

The speaker explained that the pro-US government in Colombo, painted as the saviour of democracy by all the pseudo-left groups and trade unions, was fulfilling the political and economic agenda of finance capital and is rapidly moving toward authoritarian rule. Many repressive laws were in the pipeline while the army was being further strengthened.

"Not a single day passes without a protest being held by some section of the people in some area of the island," Dias said. "It is in this context that President Sirisena has invited the former

army commander Sarath Fonseka to assume special repressive powers 'for two years to discipline the country'."

Dias said the proposal immediately brought to mind what the late Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike, in her desperation, told media in 1964, just before she called on the treacherous 'left' leaders to join her government. She said: "Some feel that these [strike] troubles can be eliminated by the establishment of a dictatorship... Still others maintain that a national government should be formed to solve this problem. I considered these ideas, but my conclusion is that none of these solutions will help. Therefore, gentlemen, I decided to initiate talks with the leaders of the working class..."

Dias explained that the ruling class in Sri Lanka had tried the last two "solutions." It formed the coalition government with the left leaders in 1964 to stifle the powerful working-class movement against the government. Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, the leaders of the two main bourgeois parties, formed the current "national government." After several decades, the ruling elite was now returning to the first alternative—brutal dictatorship.

The speaker called on the audience to support the campaign for the release of the framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers in India and to join the struggle to establish a socialist republic of Sri Lanka as part of the fight for a union of Socialist Republics of South Asia and internationally.

In conclusion, Dias emphasised the historic significance of the international May Day rally held by the ICFI and the ongoing centenary celebration of the 1917 Russian Revolution on the *World Socialist Web Site* to politically educate the new generation of working people and youth internationally.

Before and after the meeting, many workers and youth signed the online petition demanding the immediate release of the Maruti Suzuki workers. When the chair announced a 200,000-rupee fund to finance this campaign, the audience responded by contributing nearly 30,000 rupees—about two months' salary for a Sri Lanka worker.



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