

Sri Lankan SEP and IYSSE commemorate Russian Revolution at Peradeniya University

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a successful public meeting on the centenary of the Russian Revolution at the University of Peradeniya's Arts Theatre in Kandy, the central province capital, on Wednesday.

The event was attended by about 40 people, including students, lecturers and workers. Organised under the patronage of the university's Fine Art Department it was the first SEP/IYSSE meeting on the campus in a decade.

SEP/IYSSE members campaigned extensively at the university and in neighbouring areas prior to the meeting provoking animated discussions on the political lessons of the October Revolution. Thousands of leaflets advertising the event were distributed and copies of Sinhala translations of *Why Study the Russian Revolution* and Leon Trotsky's *In Defence of October Revolution* sold to students and staff members.

A number of students also signed the International Committee of the Fourth International's online petition opposing Google's censorship of the *World Socialist Web Site* and other progressive Internet publications.

The campaigners defied anti-democratic threats by members of Peradeniya University Student Union, which is led by the pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP). Student union leaders claimed that campaigners needed permission from them to promote the event.

The meeting consisted of four elements: a lecture on the Russian Revolution, a screening of the documentary *Tsar to Lenin*, an introduction to the Sinhala version of *Why Study the Russian Revolution*, and a question-and-answer session.

SEP member Lohan Gunaweera, who chaired the event and thanked the Fine Arts Department for its sponsorship said: "We are holding this meeting not as a

ritual commemoration of the Russian Revolution but to assimilate the great strategic lessons of this extraordinary episode in mankind's history and in the fight against war and social counter revolution today."

SEP political committee member Pani Wijesiriwardane delivered the lecture, pointing out that the meeting was being held on the 100th anniversary of the day that the Russian working class took political power in October 1917. The proletarian revolution, he explained, overthrew the bourgeois provisional government, established the first workers' state in history and was the first step of the world socialist revolution.

Wijesiriwardane pointed out that while some historians and the pseudo-left treated the revolutionary toppling of the centuries-old tsarist monarchy in February 1917 as a "national affair," the taking of political power by the working class in the October Revolution was "an international event."

The speaker drew out the significance of the sharp political struggle waged by Lenin, following his return to Russia in April 1917. Lenin's fight, Wijesiriwardane said, was to reorient the Bolshevik Party and prepare the Russian working class for power.

Wijesiriwardane noted the recent WSWWS Perspective by David North, which referred to the October Revolution as the first episode in the new epoch of world socialist revolution. "The crisis-ridden capitalist system once again threatens a catastrophic world war. This is why we hold the position that this epoch is not yet finished," Wijesiriwardane said.

Referring to the world-wide attack on the Russian Revolution by the bourgeois media, academics and the pseudo-left, the speaker noted that Sri Lanka's Frontline Socialist Party claimed the October Revolution was a "failed experiment." In contrast to

these claims, Wijesiriwardane said, “we consider the October Revolution as one of the greatest achievements of mankind.”

The lecture and the screening of *Tsar to Lenin*, provoked a lively discussion.

One university lecturer asked how the workers’ government resolved the land question in Russia.

Wijesiriwardane answered by citing the Bolshevik government’s “Peasant Mandate on Lands” and explained how the landed proprietorship was abolished without any compensation to wealthy landowners. Other issues discussed included the rise of Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy, the social and economic achievements of the revolution and the liquidation of the Soviet Union in 1991.

After the meeting several students and workers engaged in lengthy discussions with SEP and IYSSE members. More than ten copies of *Why Study the Russian Revolution* and other publications were sold.

B. Maliyagoda, a third-year art student, said: “I’ve read about Russian Revolution to some extent but my knowledge was broadened by the lecture and the film. There is not much knowledge among the people, however, regarding the Russian Revolution and so you have to educate them through programs like this.”

The lessons of the revolution were intimately related to the contemporary situation, she said and added: “There is a threat of a third world war and capitalist governments are attacking every right of the people. In Sri Lanka the government is attacking free education and other rights and so a clear program is required to unite people.”

Denouncing the student union’s attempts to block the SEP campaign at the university, she continued: “We have problems with them [student union]. They are harassing students who do not agree with them.” Maliyagoda said she would continue to follow the WSWS to learn more about an international socialist perspective.

Dilshan, a final year art student, said: “I didn’t have any knowledge of the Russian Revolution and so I came to find out what happened. The meeting was very interesting and so was the film. It gave me an idea about how the people fought in a revolution. As detailed in the meeting, an international anti-war movement of the working class against a third world war is needed.”

Hashan Madushanka, an electricity board worker from Kandy attended the meeting after seeing a poster. “I believe that the threat of war and social crisis can only be countered by building a socialist movement,” he said. “This event aroused an enthusiasm in me. I bought some books and when I have money I hope to buy some more. Above all, you must let me know when your party is organising discussions.”

Referring to strike action by electricity board workers, he said. “It’s been said that electricity workers were able to obtain solutions to their problems after the recent struggle but the real meaning has been giving with one hand and taking back with the other. I understand today the necessity of a genuine socialist program for working people.”



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