Despite government ban, Sri Lankan SEP and IYSSE hold successful May Day meeting

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 powerful May Day public meeting in Colombo on May 1. The event was held outside the New Town Hall and in defiance of a Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government ban on all May Day meetings and demonstrations.

Responding to a government directive, the Colombo Municipal Council cancelled an already paid-for SEP booking for its meeting at the New Town Hall. All other parties and unions that reserved venues for May Day events faced similar bans.

More than 100 people—workers, youth, professionals and housewives, as well as party member and supporters—attended the SEP's May 1 meeting. Tamil-speaking workers and youth from the war-ravaged Jaffna Peninsula and central hill country plantations were among them. Thousands of people participated in other May Day rallies on the same day across Sri Lanka.

Chairing the SEP meeting, WSWS national editor K. Ratnayake thanked those in attendance and extended revolutionary greetings to all sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), and to the international working class, in particular the Maruti Suzuki workers in India, 13 of whom have been jailed for life on frame-up charges.

Ratnayake explained that the growing mass opposition to the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government was part of an international upsurge of the class struggle. The government was terrified by this development, he said, that was why it "directly targeted the working class and banned May Day events in violation of its own constitution and law."

IYSSE convener Kapila Fernando told the meeting the pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) was downplaying the anti-democratic character of the May Day ban. "In this way, the FSP works to cover up real dangers the working class faces under the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government," he said.

SEP political committee member Vilani Peiris compared the political situation facing the international working class today with the eruption of revolutionary struggle 50 years ago in 1968. She said the Stalinist and Social Democratic parties and trade unions that dominated the working class five decades ago and betrayed that international movement had collapsed today.

"The Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the predecessor of the SEP, was founded in 1968 under conditions of an international eruption of the class struggle. It raised the banner of Trotskyism and its revolutionary perspective and program in South Asia." The SEP was based on and continued that heritage, Peiris said. "That is why it has taken the initiative to mobilise the working class against the May Day bans on the perspective of international socialism."

SEP general secretary and WSWS International Editorial Board member Wije Dias delivered the main report. He said thousands of Sri Lankan workers, youth and oppressed people were attending May Day rallies in defiance of the government ban.

"There is a widespread opposition among workers and youth against the government's illegal ban," he said, "but our responsibility as revolutionaries is to explain the real meaning of this May Day ban and the political potential of that widespread anger."

Dias said the deepening economic and political crisis of world capitalism and the degenerated stage of bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka were part of a developing revolutionary crisis. "In Sri Lanka the ruling regime has no idea where its head turns and what it intends to

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do. Its left hand does not know that its right hand is doing."

Dias quoted from the analysis made by Leon Trotsky in 1934, five years before the outbreak of World War II, and warned that the same basic political processes were present today.

Trotsky wrote in "War and the International": "The stress of inner contradictions pushes one country after another on the road to fascism, which, in its turn, cannot maintain power except by preparing international explosions. All governments fear war. But none of the governments has any freedom of choice. Without a proletarian revolution, a new world war is inevitable."

Dias quoted from the July 2014 ICFI statement against imperialist war and the necessity for the mobilisation of the world proletariat to put an end the capitalist profit system:

"There can be no fight for socialism without a struggle against war and there can be no fight against war without a struggle for socialism. Imperialist war must be opposed by the working class, leading behind it the youth and oppressed masses, on the basis of a socialist program: the fight to take political power, expropriate the banks and major corporations and begin the task of constructing a world federation of workers' states."

The SEP general secretary concluded by calling on all those in attendance to register and participate in the ICFI's Online May Day Rally on May 5. "Through this work we are establishing the foundations of a mass revolutionary working-class party fighting for international socialism. I call upon all of you to shoulder that task."

The lively May Day meeting collected over 17,000 rupees for the SEP's party-building fund and ended with the singing of The Internationale.

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