

Fifty years of the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka

Arm the working class with the program of socialist internationalism and with revolutionary leadership!

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), today marks 50 years of struggle for the political independence of the working class and the program of world socialist revolution. On June 16-17, 1968, at a congress in Colombo, the party was founded as the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL). In line with the other sections of the ICFI, the RCL was transformed in 1996 into the SEP.

The RCL was founded to resolve the crisis of revolutionary working class leadership amid a growing upsurge of the world working class. It was an audacious but urgently necessary and theoretically grounded challenge to the political forces that then dominated the international working class: the vast and seemingly all-powerful Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies; Maoism, with its glorification of peasant-based armed struggle; and myriad bourgeois nationalist movements in the historically oppressed countries, including India's Congress Party, which presented their state-led development projects as "socialism" and maneuvered between Moscow, Beijing and world imperialism.

What was common to all these forces was their adherence to a nationalist program and virulent opposition to socialist internationalism.

In the most immediate sense, the RCL was founded in answer to the ignominious betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which claimed to be Trotskyist and had until shortly before been a leading section of the Pabloite United Secretariat.

In 1964, after years of opportunist backsliding, the LSSP had betrayed an insurgent mass working class movement of which it was in the leadership and entered into a bourgeois government led by the Sinhala-populist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). In seeking the LSSP's support, Prime Minister Madame Bandaranaike had made clear that for the crisis-ridden Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, the only alternative to bringing "the workers' leaders" into government was, to use her words, "dictatorship" and making the workers "work at the point of gun and bayonet."

In becoming the first-ever party claiming to be Trotskyist to enter a bourgeois government, the LSSP repudiated any and all connection with permanent revolution. In 1947-48, when British imperialism relinquished formal political control over its South Asian empire, the Sri Lankan Trotskyists had denounced "independence" as a sham and the ethno-communal partition of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka as an historic crime. The transfer of power to the rival factions of the colonial bourgeoisie merely changed the form of imperialist domination with the aim of suppressing an increasingly rebellious working class and preventing the revolutionary liquidation of landlordism, casteism and numerous other feudal vestiges.

Alone the Trotskyists had opposed the denial of citizenship rights to the

Tamil-speaking plantation workers, then the largest section of the Sri Lankan working class, warning that communalism was a weapon to divide the working class.

But by the early 1960s, the LSSP was advancing a diametrically opposed perspective. It now claimed socialism could be achieved within the framework of the Sri Lankan state and through parliamentary reforms and alliances with the bourgeois SLFP and other noxious Sinhala chauvinists.

In the aftermath of the "great betrayal" of 1964, many in and around the LSSP, including the newly constituted LSSP (R), claimed to oppose its reformist, parliamentary politics. But they did so on a superficial and thoroughly nationalist basis.

The RCL and the fight against Pabloite opportunism

The RCL was founded by a group of youth, radicalized by the Vietnam war and the manifest failure of decolonization to resolve any of the problems of the masses, who—under the ICFI's influence and guidance—drew far-reaching conclusions as to the roots and significance of the LSSP's betrayal and its lessons for the building of revolutionary workers' parties in Asia and around the world.

The LSSP's political degeneration and transformation into the most important social prop of bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka was rooted in broader social processes: the emergence within the Fourth International of a petty-bourgeois liquidationist tendency which, in response to the temporary restabilization of capitalism, abandoned the Trotskyist characterization of Stalinism that had underpinned the very formation of the Fourth International, renounced the struggle for revolutionary working class leadership, and looked to other social forces to establish "socialism."

Led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, this tendency, in the name of integrating into the "real movement of the masses," advocated the liquidation of the Fourth International's national sections into the Stalinist and social democratic parties and, in Asia, the bourgeois nationalist movements, with the stated aim of pushing them to the "left."

The ICFI was founded in 1953 to oppose Pabloite liquidationism and defend the Trotskyist program and strategy of permanent revolution.

The LSSP claimed to oppose the most extravagant of Pablo and Mandel's claims about the purported revolutionary role and "self-reform" of the Kremlin Stalinist bureaucracy and its satellite Communist Parties. Nevertheless, it refused to join the ICFI, fearing the orthodox Trotskyists'

struggle for the political independence of working class would cut across its own increasingly class conciliatory politics.

Thereafter, an opportunist working relationship developed between Colombo and Paris, whereby the LSSP lent support and prestige to Pablo and Mandel's phony Fourth International and the latter provided a political cover for the LSSP's descent into parliamentarianism and trade unionism, and its adaptation to the bourgeoisie's promotion of Sinhala populism as a means of splitting the working class and binding it to its rule.

In 1963 as they "reunited" the "Fourth International" on the basis of the claim that the Cuban Revolution proved socialism could be established without a proletarian party or proletarian revolution, the Pabloite leaders of the United Secretariat hailed the LSSP as the exemplar of the "mass Trotskyist parties" they wanted to build.

Those who founded the RCL recognized that the forging of the political independence of the working class—its transformation from an object of exploitation into the protagonist of a new social order—was bound up with an unrelenting political-theoretical struggle against Pabloism and all forms of national opportunism. Or, as the pioneer American Trotskyist James P. Cannon put it, "Nine-tenths of the struggle for socialism is the struggle against bourgeois influence in the workers' organizations, including the party."

The RCL founding congress

The June 1968 founding congress clearly defined the RCL as a revolutionary party of the working class dedicated to the fight for socialist internationalism.

It passed three resolutions. The first pledged to build the RCL as a section of the ICFI. It summed up the congress discussion, which had emphasized the international character of the class struggle, the need therefore for an international party, the correctness of the Fourth International's characterization of Stalinism and social democracy as counterrevolutionary, and the "inseparable" connection between "an uncompromising struggle against all forms of revisionism" and "maximum" participation in the class struggle.

The second resolution saluted the May-June 1968 revolutionary upsurge of the French working class and indicted the Stalinist Communist Party for rescuing De Gaulle's regime and French capitalism. "This gigantic struggle," it stated, marked the onset of revolutionary struggles in Western Europe and "shattered the Pabloite revisionist theories that the center of revolution had shifted to the colonies and semi-colonies and that the Stalinists would be transformed into revolutionaries under mass pressure."

The third resolution supported the Vietnamese workers and peasants in their struggle against US imperialism. It emphasized that genuine national liberation could be secured only through the overthrow of world imperialism and that this required the revolutionary mobilization of the working class in Europe and North America as well as Asia.

The founding congress warned of the deeply reactionary implications of the embrace by the LSSP and, before it, its now close ally the Stalinist Communist Party of Ceylon (CPC), of "Sinhala first" policies. Prophetically, the congress warned that the "nationalist campaign carried out by the coalitionist camp (the SFLP-LSSP-CPC alliance) has prepared suitable ground" for a "Sinhala Buddhist dictatorship."

Above all, through its affiliation to the ICFI and the revolutionary perspective it elaborated, the congress revived the fight for the program of permanent revolution among the workers and oppressed toilers of Sri Lanka. This included the understanding that in the epoch of imperialism, the unresolved democratic tasks in countries of belated capitalist

development will be resolved only through a working class-led socialist revolution.

In keeping with this, the RCL reaffirmed the Trotskyist characterization of the reactionary nation-state framework established in 1947-1948 as part of the post-war restabilization of capitalism and rejected any nationalist conception of a Sri Lankan revolution, independent and separate from the development of socialist revolution across South Asia and, ultimately, throughout the world.

The LSSP's role in rescuing bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka presaged and paralleled events around the world.

Between 1968 and 1975, as the post-Second World War capitalist boom collapsed, the working class mounted a global revolutionary offensive. As the RCL founding congress anticipated, the French general strike of May-June 1968 was followed by a succession of upheavals. These included the 1969 "hot summer" in Italy, the 1974 British miners' strike that brought down the Heath Conservative government, and the collapse of fascist regimes in Greece and Portugal.

But imperialism was ultimately able to withstand this offensive due to the counterrevolutionary role of the Stalinist and social democratic parties. In suppressing the revolutionary strivings of the working class, the bureaucratic "workers' parties" were aided and abetted at every turn by the Pabloites, who systematically promoted illusions in them while working to isolate the ICFI and deny the working class access to the revolutionary Trotskyist program.

In Sri Lanka, the short-lived coalition of 1964 was followed by the "second coalition" from 1970 to 1975, which increasingly came into open conflict with the working class and rural masses. The criminal role of the LSSP was exemplified by the chauvinist 1972 constitution. Authored by LSSP leader Colvin de Silva, it imposed discriminatory job and education quotas on the Tamil minority and enshrined Buddhism as the state religion and Sinhalese as the sole official language.

The LSSP's betrayal buttressed all manner of rightwing forces, creating immense challenges for the newly formed RCL.

In India, the Stalinist Communist Party (CPI) was badly discredited by its close relations with the big business Congress Party and open support for New Delhi in the 1962 Indo-China border war. But the Stalinists, especially the Maoist Naxhalite movement, were able to point to the criminal role being played by the LSSP (far and away the best known "Trotskyist" party in Asia) to wall off revolutionary minded workers and youth from genuine Trotskyism.

In Sri Lanka, the LSSP's political suppression of the working class opened the door to the unrestrained growth of communal politics, both by legitimizing Sinhala communalism and shattering the confidence of the Tamil minority that it could look to the working class to defend its democratic rights.

The RCL's struggle against the petty-bourgeois radical JVP

Critical to the development of the RCL was the principled stand it took against the petty-bourgeois radical politics of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which gained widespread support among students and peasant youth based on an eclectic mixture of Maoism, Castroism and Sinhala "patriotism" or chauvinism.

In 1970, Keerthi Balasuriya, who had been elected RCL general-secretary at the party's founding congress at the age of just 19, wrote a withering Marxist critique of the JVP, *The Politics and Class Nature of the JVP*. He exposed the JVP as organically hostile to the working class, rooted in reactionary nationalism and peddling dangerous illusions about the "progressive" potential of the national bourgeoisie and the efficacy of

peasant-based armed struggle. Rejecting those who claimed armed struggle was the touchstone of revolutionary politics, Comrade Balasuriya wrote, “The question of revolution cannot even be posed without a genuinely objective evaluation of the interrelationships between the classes and their dynamics.”

The RCL’s general secretary warned that the JVP’s Sinhala chauvinism, which included denunciations of “privileged” Tamil-speaking plantation workers, led to fascism. “The JVP,” he warned, “is creating an anti-working class movement in Lanka that could well be utilized in the future by a fascist movement.”

Through its exposure of the politics of the JVP, the RCL deepened its class differentiation from radical Sinhala populism and from all those parties, including the LSSP and LSSP (R), which adapted to it.

This same revolutionary orientation impelled the RCL to oppose the vicious assault the capitalist coalition government launched against the JVP and rural youth in the south of the island the following year, after the JVP launched a politically bankrupt “armed uprising.” For this principled stand, the RCL’s newspapers were declared illegal in 1971 and for a period the party had to function underground and under threat of state violence. Nonetheless, it campaigned for the working class to oppose the state repression and raised the demand “Free the political prisoners.” As we explained at the time, the working class had a responsibility to defend the rural masses as part of the process of forging an alliance with the peasantry against the bourgeoisie and its state.

On his release from prison in 1978, JVP leader Wijeweera was forced to acknowledge the importance of the RCL’s defence campaign, conveying his personal thanks in a visit to the RCL offices.

The bourgeois counter-offensive and the anti-Tamil war

The derailing of the global working class upsurge of 1968-1975 laid the basis for a capitalist counter-offensive, which began in the late 1970s and whose initial stages will forever be associated with the names of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

The efforts of the “socialist” SLFP-LSSP-CPC coalition to place the burden of the capitalist crisis on to the backs of the working class and rural masses paved the way for the coming to power in 1977 of an openly rightwing United National Party (UNP) government under J. R. Jayewardene. It threw Sri Lanka open to unfettered exploitation by global capital, smashed the 1980 public-sector workers’ general strike, and ratcheted up Sinhala communalism to channel mounting social tensions and anger in a reactionary direction. This process culminated in Colombo’s launching of a civil war against the Tamil minority in 1983.

The RCL/SEP alone fought to mobilize the working class against the war, which would dominate the island’s political life for the next quarter century. It demanded the immediate withdrawal of all troops and security forces from the majority-Tamil north and east and systematically exposed how the war was being used to attack the social and democratic rights of the entire working class.

At the same time, it opposed the nationalist-separatist perspective of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the other Tamil nationalist organizations, such as the People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), fighting to forge the unity of the working class in opposition to the Sri Lankan state and capitalism.

The Tamil nationalist movement was thrown into crisis in 1987 when the Indian government, to which it had looked for support and which had been providing it with arms in a cynical maneuver to advance the geopolitical interests of the Indian bourgeoisie, changed course. Fearing that the crisis in Sri Lanka was undermining the reactionary South Asian

nation-state system as a whole, New Delhi withdrew its patronage of the Tamil insurgent groups. Under the July 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, which initially was supported by all the Tamil groups, including the LTTE, Indian troops were deployed to the island ostensibly as peacekeepers, but in reality to ensure the unity of the Sri Lankan capitalist state.

The RCL stood alone in opposing the Indo-Sri Lankan accord from the standpoint of the interests of the working class.

Following intensive discussions with the RCL leadership, the ICFI issued a comprehensive statement titled “The Situation in Sri Lanka and the Political Tasks of the Revolutionary Communist League.” Based on a review of the experiences of the independent states established after World War II in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, it explained: “Invariably, imperialist-sanctioned ‘independence’ has meant the setting up of bastard states whose very foundations have been built upon a fatal compromise of democratic principles. In this process, the national bourgeoisie has functioned not as the liberator of the oppressed masses, but as a junior partner in imperialist plunder. The type of state created in this process has been nothing more than a prison ground for putrefying capitalism, upon which the progressive development of the productive forces has been impossible... Arising out of such conditions, with the joyous approval of the bourgeoisie, are the horrors of inter-communal warfare. This state of affairs cannot be altered as long as bourgeois rule prevails. The post-independence history of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma—in fact, of every former colonial country in the world—decisively proves that the bourgeoisie cannot establish genuine national unification and political independence.”

The statement, while reaffirming the RCL’s implacable opposition to the communal war waged by Colombo, unambiguously asserted that the democratic rights of the Tamils could be realised only through the struggle for socialism. In opposition to both Sri Lankan and Tamil factions of the bourgeoisie and their rival nationalisms, it advanced the call for the Socialist United States of Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam.

Tragically, this was the last major statement on which Comrade Keerthi Balasuriya would work. His death of a coronary thrombosis in December 1987 robbed the Sri Lankan and international working class of a brilliant strategist of world socialist revolution. He was just 39.

Based on the development of the program of permanent revolution made by the ICFI and RCL in response to the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, the RCL was able to intervene among young Tamil militants who had been forced to take refuge in Europe. The most farsighted drew the conclusion that it was only on the basis of the ICFI’s perspective and an orientation to the international working class that the oppression of the Tamils could be ended. These forces joined the ICFI, strengthening its work in both Europe and South Asia.

In the years that followed, the RCL/SEP intensified its struggle, under conditions of the renewal of civil war and repeated violent attacks by the state, the JVP and the LTTE. Yet such was the strength of the Trotskyist program and tradition established by the RCL that it was able to maintain links with supporters in LTTE-occupied parts of the island and, with the ICFI’s assistance, mount an international defence campaign in 1998 that won the release of four SEP members who had been detained by the LTTE for agitating for the party’s program. With the end of the civil war, the SEP was able to resume open political work in the north and east and broaden the struggle to unite the working class in opposition to all factions of the bourgeoisie and their nationalist-communist politics.

Ultimately, the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, with the aid of the imperialist powers and India, was able to vanquish the LTTE and in 2009 “reunite” the island under its reactionary rule.

The SEP’s 2011 perspectives resolution, *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, provided an assessment of the tasks facing the working class in the aftermath of nearly

three decades of savage communal war.

After noting the utterly fraudulent character of Colombo's claims that the end of war would bring "peace and prosperity," and warning that the bourgeoisie was maintaining a vast military-security apparatus for use against the working class, it declared, "None of the underlying issues that led to the protracted civil war has been resolved by the LTTE's military defeat... The legitimate grievances and anger felt by Tamils over decades of entrenched discrimination will inevitably erupt in new forms. The necessary political lessons have to be drawn, however. The LTTE's defeat was not primarily a military one, but was the product of the inherent weaknesses of its political perspective. From the outset, its aim was to carve out a capitalist Eelam on behalf of the Tamil bourgeoisie with the backing of India or other regional and world powers. When these same powers decisively turned against it, the LTTE was reduced to impotent pleading to the 'international community' to halt the military onslaught. The only social force in society capable of waging a struggle for genuine democratic rights against the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and its imperialist backers is the working class. However, the LTTE was always organically opposed to any orientation to unite workers—Tamil and Sinhala—on a class basis. Its indiscriminate attacks on Sinhalese civilians played into the hands of the Colombo establishment and deepened the communal divide. In areas under its control, the LTTE rode roughshod over the democratic rights and social needs of working people."

The RCL and the ICFI

If the RCL/SEP has been able to articulate a revolutionary line for the working class and defend and develop the strategy of permanent revolution under the tumultuous conditions of civil war and the essentially reactionary political environment that prevailed in Sri Lanka, this is due to its unwavering commitment to, and active participation in, the theoretical-political work of the ICFI.

The leadership and cadre of the RCL unanimously supported the ICFI's break in 1985-86 with the national opportunists of the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), who had long exploited the authority they had gained due to their role in 1950s and 1960s in fighting Pabloism to seek to impose a Pabloite line on the ICFI. This included publishing, promoting and assisting the LTTE "theoretician" Anton Balasingham in writing a 1979 article "On the Tamil National Question" that sought to turn Lenin into an apologist for bourgeois nationalism. As we have previously explained, "Whilst Lenin had insisted that for Marxists the most important consideration in the national question was 'the self-determination of working class,' Balasingham argued that Lenin required Marxists to be uncritical supporters of the separatist aspirations of the Tamil bourgeoisie."

RCL General Secretary Keerthi Balasuriya contributed to many of the key documents analyzing the WRP's abandonment of permanent revolution, including *How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism, 1973-1985*.

With the defeat of the WRP renegades, the Trotskyists regained full control over the ICFI, that is, their own organization, successfully bringing to an end a three-decade struggle against Pabloite opportunism, which inevitably was associated with adaptation to the national milieu.

The strengthening of the proletarian internationalist foundations the ICFI would prove vital in the development of the ICFI's analysis of fundamental political and socio-economic shifts in the ensuing decade. These included: the revolutionary significance of capitalist globalization, which has raised the contradiction between the development of world economy and the nation-state system in which capitalism is historically

rooted to a qualitatively new level; the advent of Gorbachev and the turn of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy to capitalist restoration; and the transformation of the pro-capitalist trade unions into corporatist appendages of management for increasing the exploitation of the working class.

1968-2018 and the vindication of permanent revolution

The full significance of the stand taken in 1968 by the few dozen people, almost all under the age of 25, who founded the RCL can be understood only in light of what the past five decades have demonstrated.

The parties and organizations that had the allegiance of the working class and oppressed masses in 1968 and whose claims to represent socialism the RCL emphatically challenged have been exposed as imposters, enemies of the working class and secondary agencies of imperialism.

In its ultimate betrayal, the Kremlin Stalinist bureaucracy restored capitalism in Russia and the other Soviet republics, a process completed with the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991. Similarly, Mao's pursuit of "socialism in one country" led first to an alliance with US imperialism, sealed by the "great helmsman" himself in his 1972 meeting with President Nixon, and then the transformation of China by his successors into global capital's principal cheap-labour production hub.

The social democratic Socialist and Labour Parties long ago shredded their reformist programs and have emerged as parties of austerity and imperialist war.

Numerous bourgeois nationalist regimes that postured as socialist have spent the past quarter-century and more prostrating themselves before imperialism. Until the Indian bourgeoisie made the Hindu supremacist BJP its principal party of government, the Congress Party spearheaded the drive to make India a sweatshop for international capital and to forge an Indo-US "global strategic" partnership.

As for the Indian Stalinist parties, the CPM and CPI, they have propped up a succession of Indian national governments that have pursued neo-liberal policies. Wherever they have formed the government of an Indian state, they have implemented what they themselves describe as "pro-investor" measures.

The putrefaction of all these organizations is rooted in their nationalist programs and orientation, which are in contradiction with the development of an ever-more integrated world economy—a process that under capitalism fuels imperialist exploitation and war, but that objectively has created the prerequisites, if freed from production for profit and the capitalist nation-state, for socialism.

The same processes have transformed the Sri Lankan political landscape.

As a result of their decades-long alliance with the SFLP, the LSSP and Stalinist CP have been reduced to empty shells that are kept around only to give the occasional "left" garland to the likes of Rajapaksa and Kumaratunga.

The JVP, after collaborating with the gangster president Premadasa in the Sinhalese bourgeois elite's scuttling of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, including launching fascistic attacks on the RCL, other left parties and trade unions, was subjected to a new round of violent state repression. Soon after, however, it integrated itself into the bourgeois political establishment.

The Tamil National Alliance, which acted as a parliamentary mouthpiece for the LTTE, continue to chase after the blessings of Washington and in pursuit of them are happy to whitewash Colombo's crimes against the Tamil people.

The Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) was only the most unabashed of the pseudo-left organizations in supporting Washington's intervention in the 2015 presidential election to replace Rajapaksa, who was deemed too close to China, with a hastily selected "common opposition" candidate. The NSSP hailed the election of Sirisena as president and the appointment of Wickremasinghe as prime minister as a "democratic revolution." No matter that the former was a Rajapaksa henchman and the latter leads the UNP, the party that launched the communal war. Fittingly, the NSSP is the Sri Lankan affiliate of the Pabloite international, which has openly supported US imperialist operations in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the struggle against capitalism only grows more urgent.

Social inequality has reached unparalleled levels, with the eight richest billionaires owning more than the poorest half of the world's population.

Ten years after the global financial crash, world capitalism is mired in an historic breakdown, to which the universal response of the rival nationally-based bourgeois cliques is to intensify the drive to sweat profit from the working and more aggressively pursue its predatory interests on the world stage through geopolitical intrigue and trade and shooting wars.

After a quarter-century in which US imperialism sought to offset the drastic erosion of its relative economic power through a series of ruinous illegal wars in the Middle East, the Balkans and Central Asia, Washington now declares a new age of "great power competition" and is systematically ratcheting up military-strategic pressure on nuclear-armed Russia and China. The other imperialist and great powers, with Germany in the lead, have taken note and are rearming.

South Asia and the Indian Ocean region have been sucked into the maelstrom. Desperate for a leg up in the scramble for markets and profits, the Indian bourgeoisie has aligned itself ever more closely with Washington, transforming India into a "frontline state" in the US military-strategic offensive against China. Politics and class relations in every state in South Asia, from Sri Lanka and tiny Maldives to India and its arch-rival Pakistan, are being convulsed by the region's emergence as a central arena of imperialist and great power conflict.

While India's 120-plus billionaires join Modi in celebrating India's "rise," three-quarters of the country's 1.3 billion people eke out a harrowing existence on \$2 US per day or less.

What emerges is that the only viable program for the working class is the program of permanent revolution—the unification of the struggles of the working class the world over in an offensive against capitalism and for the socialist reorganization of society. That is the program of the SEP and ICFI.

Because this program corresponds to the objective needs of the working class, the ICFI has grown immeasurably stronger over the past three decades.

Recognizing the change in class relations represented by the political and organizational collapse of the bureaucratic national-based "labour" organizations, the ICFI in 1995-96 transformed its sections from leagues orientated to exposing the perfidy of the old organizations into Socialist Equality Parties. It thereby assumed direct responsibility for providing revolutionary leadership to the working class.

Some two years later, the ICFI initiated the *World Socialist Web Site*, the first and most popular socialist website in the world. Through the WSWS not only does the ICFI provide the world working class with a daily analysis in English, Sinhalese, Tamil and other languages of the most important developments in the class struggle and world politics and geopolitics so it can orient its class response. The WSWS also unifies and integrates the work of the ICFI as the highest conscious expression of the developing international struggle of the working class, a struggle that can and must spread across national borders and continents.

A new era of revolutionary struggle

The ICFI's struggle to defend and develop the program of permanent revolution is now intersecting with a growing movement of the working class. After decades in which the class struggle was artificially suppressed by the trade unions and Stalinist and social democratic parties, the working class is beginning to reassert its class interests. 2018 has seen a wave of militant strikes in the US, France, Germany, Britain and the Middle East.

In India, the Modi government and the Indian ruling class sit atop a social powder keg, as underscored by last month's massacre of working people in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu protesting against the poisoning of the environment by a copper smelter owned by an Indian billionaire. In Sri Lanka, workers, youth and farmers are challenging the government's imposition of brutal austerity and wholesale privatizations at the behest of the IMF.

The task of the RCL and ICFI is to lay bare before the working class that the objective logic of its opposition to social inequality, poverty, the ruling class assault on democratic rights and militarism and war is the struggle for workers' power. This requires, to borrow the words of Lenin in his seminal work *What Is To Be Done?*, saturating the working class with socialist consciousness.

It is with this aim and as part of the struggle to forge the revolutionary party the working class needs to prosecute the fight for socialism that the SEP will mark fifty years of struggle with a series of meetings, lectures, WSWS articles and interviews with party leaders. These will review the party's history from the standpoint of clarifying the key questions it has tackled in elaborating a program and perspective that articulate the objective revolutionary interests of the working class.

This campaign will be mounted in conjunction with, and as part of, the ICFI's marking of the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International, under Trotsky's leadership, in 1938.

- Build the SEP as the mass revolutionary party of the working class, rallying behind it the rural toilers in struggle against all sections of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and in the fight for a workers and peasants' government!

- Bring the program of permanent revolution to the workers of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and throughout South Asia!

- Make the struggle to build a global socialist movement against imperialism and war the cutting edge of the fight against social inequality and austerity!

- Appropriate the revolutionary program, principles and history of Trotskyism—the Marxism of the 21st Century—and build the ICFI as the World Party of Socialist Revolution!



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