

Workers and students support Sri Lankan meetings on the struggle for Trotskyism

Our reporters

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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka is holding meetings next month to mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International (FI) and the 50th anniversary of the SEP's establishment. They will be held at Peradeniya University on October 3 and New Town Hall Colombo on October 7.

David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, is the main speaker at both events. North, who is also the chairman of the SEP in the United States, has played a leading role in the international socialist movement for four decades and is an internationally acclaimed authority on the history of the Trotskyist movement.

SEP and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) members have been campaigning at workplaces, working-class neighbourhoods and universities to publicise the meetings. We publish below a selection of comments from workers and youth on the importance of the events.

Thusitha, a statistics student at University of Colombo, acknowledged the necessity for an international movement to unite the working class. "In the current situation we need a political organisation that fights for the interests of the bottom layers of the society," he said.

"In Sri Lanka, politicians are not interested about the ordinary masses and have no sense of the real needs of the people. Listening to you I also understand that it's no different in other countries, whether they are so-called developed or underdeveloped countries."

Referring to ongoing protests by Sri Lankan students, Thusitha said, "Our problems are mounting day by day. Privatisation of education, lack of basic facilities at universities and the grim employment prospects are the major issues. And the situation is even worse for youth

who are unable to enter the campuses. How can we solve these problems?

Workers, youth and the oppressed people have to unite and fight to solve their problems on their own, he added. "From what you've said, I understand that the strength of the Fourth International lies in its internationalist program. It's very encouraging that an international socialist leader is coming to talk to us in Sri Lanka."

Tharinda, another University of Colombo student, explained that he had been reading the WSWs for some time and although he knew about the Fourth International had not closely studied its program. "Today's political situation is very complex and youth and students are perplexed by this complexity," he said.

SEP supporters explained that this was a result of the deliberate confusions and demoralisation propagated by the old Stalinist parties, pseudo-left and other anti-working class organisations worldwide.

Most students, Tharinda said, understand that the crisis in education is a symptom of a bigger systemic failure in Sri Lanka and on a world scale. "But as you have explained, this crisis can metastasise into a third world war. We already see signs of such a conflagration reflected in the tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in the Middle East." These conflicts, he said, were instigated by the US and other imperialist powers.

The SEP meetings in October, he added, "would indeed be a good opportunity for us to listen to David North, a world leader of socialism."

SEP and IYSSE members also spoke with Colombo port workers who expressed their interest in the meetings and admired the 80-year principled struggle of the Fourth International.

Samanthi, a port clerical worker, said workers' illusions in the two main capitalist parties—the Sri

Lanka Freedom Party and the United National Party—had been shattered a long time ago.

“But we thought that parties, such as the JVP [Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna], who call themselves socialists, may be able to pressure these parties and get concessions for the people. The futility of this approach has been proven in the recent years. I agree with your program of building a truly independent party of the workers,” she said.

Samanthi explained how shipping traffic had plummeted in 2008 as a result of global crisis and how this had impacted on port workers. “Even our over-time payments were restricted. The port has never recovered from that shock and we’re cracking up under the day-to-day hardships imposed on us. We cannot deal with the rising cost of living with our stagnant salaries and our jobs are not secure because the government wants to privatise the port.

“After speaking with you I understand that the roots of our problems are global and that they can be solved only through the international unity of workers,” she said.

Ravindra, from the Colombo South Port container yard, denounced successive Sri Lankan governments, the existing political parties and the trade unions, but said he had doubts about the “feasibility” of a socialist program because of the huge political problems confronting the working class.

“In 1917 there were dedicated workers who achieved a revolution. I don’t see that dedication now. Do you think that we could change this situation?” he asked.

SEP campaigners explained that the emerging radicalisation of the international working class and the growing interest in socialism constituted the foundations for the development of a revolutionary movement of such dedicated workers. Ravindra attentively discussed the Russian Revolution and the history of the Fourth International with SEP members.

Dushantha, a port worker, said he agreed with the SEP’s political program. “You have to go house-to-house and educate people in order to mobilise them,” he said.

“If we can win one man from each house then changing this system by a revolution is not impossible. It’s not the same old generation we have now. Parents also know that their children do not have future within this system.” Dushantha made a donation to the SEP

and said he would attend the Colombo meeting.

Amila, who is studying for the GCE (OL) examination and the son of a port worker, described how the economic crisis in Sri Lanka has impacted on school students. “We are very uncertain about our future,” he said. “Only a fraction of students get the opportunity to attend government universities. University students are protesting every day and for those who do graduate there’s no guarantee that they’ll get a job.”

Amila said that these conditions and the cut-throat competition to achieve high marks meant that students have very little time for politics, art, literature or any other intellectual activity. “In addition to attending school I go to private tuition classes six days a week. Most days I don’t get home until around 9 p.m.

“Our parents discourage us from getting involved in politics because of the terrible experiences of the past, but I agree that a real socialist program is needed to overcome our problems. Students should re-enter politics and start studying socialism.”



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