

Sri Lankan students discuss upcoming anniversary meetings on the history of the Trotskyist movement

Our reporters
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The campaign for public meetings in Sri Lanka this week celebrating 80 years since the founding of the Fourth International (FI) and the 50th anniversary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is winning important support from students and academics.

David North, Chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site*'s International Editorial Board and of the SEP (US), will address meetings on October 3, at the University of Peradeniya in Kandy, and October 7 at Colombo's New Town Hall.

The events are being held amid ongoing university student protests against inadequate facilities and the privatisation of education.

On September 12, thousands of Aesthetic University students in Colombo demonstrated to demand that government expenditure on education be lifted to 6 percent of GDP, and that compulsory exams for students who do not maintain an 80 percent attendance rate be abolished. As students step up their agitation, the Sri Lankan government is planning repressive measures against the demonstrators.

University students in Kandy and Colombo spoke with SEP campaigners about the mounting financial difficulties they face, their concerns about unemployment and their support for the forthcoming SEP meetings.

Senuri and **Samanthi**, two science students from the University of Peradeniya, spoke about the rising cost of living.

“It’s expensive buying meals from the university canteens,” Senuri said. “Even though they are cheap we have to spend about 200 rupees [\$US1.18] per day for meals. To travel [once a week to our parents’ home] costs 500 rupees and lots of money is needed to get

study notes photocopied. All together, we need a minimum of 15,000 rupees per month. I need a part time job but I don’t have enough time for that.”

Senuri said science students found it difficult to get work in the industrial sector. “Apart from a degree, these jobs require an additional professional qualification and that means doing a human resource management course, which costs around 40,000 rupees. My father is involved in the coconut trade, but because coconut prices are fluctuating we do not have enough income.”

Samanthi criticised the profit system and its ruling elites. “Every government that comes to power puts the economic burden on the masses. The increasing cost of living makes it very difficult to live,” she said.

“My father is a paddy farmer, but it is running at a loss because of the increasing cost of manure and agricultural chemicals.”

Two other female students from the Aesthetic University in Colombo said that “free education” existed in name only.

“Our parents have to spend large amounts of money for our education, from school to university,” one of them said. “The university has not granted any money for our research, but if we raise questions about that we face many problems.”

Sampath, a visual arts student, said that demonstrations against the government’s attacks on public education over the past four years had failed to secure any student demands.

“University students have waged various protests against the privatisation of public education and other attacks but have gained nothing,” he said. “Without a struggle involving students and the entire working

class, we cannot defend our rights or secure a decent future. The most important thing today is to prepare workers and youth for such a struggle.”

Ranjith Perera, a lecturer at the Aesthetic University, said David North’s public meetings in Sri Lanka were important and would examine critical historical issues.

“The crisis in the arts field is one aspect of the crisis of the whole capitalist system,” he said.

“The government has cut funding for artistic creation and exhibitions. Art activities have been neglected in the schools. Education under capitalism has severe limitations.

“The only purpose of today’s education system is to produce labour for the exploitation by the capitalist class. This is an international phenomenon. Workers and youth are eager to fight against this but the leaderships of the trade unions and student unions divert them from a united fight.”

Randula, a final-year management student at the University of Sri Jayawardenapura, agreed that the SEP’s anniversary meetings were important.

“The lessons of history help workers and students understand what they should do. They must be familiar with the experiences of the October Revolution.

“After discussion with you, I now understand that the contradiction between the nation-state system and the global economy under capitalism is the root cause of war and the danger of a nuclear war conflict,” he said.



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