

SEP meetings launch Tamil edition of *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka recently held two successful public meetings to launch the Tamil-language edition of David North's *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*. The SEP published a Sinhala-language edition of the book in 2016. David North is chairman of the US SEP and of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The meetings were held at the Hatton Town Hall in the central plantation district and at Weerasingham Hall in Jaffna in the war-ravaged north of the island on February 24 and March 1 respectively.

The Hatton meeting was attended by plantation workers, including several members of the Abbotsleigh Estate Workers Action Committee and workers from the Annfield Estate, where several employees are being victimised in the aftermath of the recent estate workers' wage struggle. Other workers, students and youth attended the events and around 50 copies of the book were sold on campaigns prior to and at these meetings.

Chairing the Hatton meeting, SEP Political Committee member M. Thevarajah began by explaining David North's decades-long contribution to the international socialist movement and thanked Tamil-speaking SEP members in Europe for their involvement in the translation of the book.

"The recent struggle of Sri Lankan plantation workers against the estate companies, trade unions and the government has coincided with the strike action by millions of workers in India," Thevarajah said. "This book will certainly provide the political and theoretical guidance that these workers need to take forward the historic struggle for the socialist transformation of the world," Thevarajah said.

SEP General Secretary Wije Dias, the main speaker, explained the necessity to study the strategic lessons of the past international class struggles, in particular the Russian Revolution. This is vital, he said, for the working class to lead a successful fight for even the most elementary demands today.

Dias noted the involvement of millions of workers around the world in militant struggles for their fundamental rights against the capitalist conglomerates and their governments in the

advanced and under-developed countries. He referred to action by US auto workers and teachers, the "yellow vest" campaign in France, and strike action in India involving millions. The struggle of the plantation workers in Sri Lanka, he continued, "is part of this same international offensive of the working class."

The speaker referred to the eruption of revolutionary struggle between 1968 and 1975. He explained that general strike action by French workers, joined by the struggles of the student youth and rural poor nearly brought down President de Gaulle's regime. The mass movement of the international working class smashed fascist dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, he said, and led to the downfall of the Tory government in Britain and the defeat of US military interventions in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Dias pointed to the similarities between that period and today, but also noted significant political differences. "When the general strike wave began in France in May–June 1968, the first cracks in the Bretton Woods dollar-gold regulatory system were only just becoming visible. Today we are witnessing a protracted breakdown of the entire capitalist economy with deepening political explosions around the globe.

"Then as now, the decisive issue facing millions of workers centres on the question of revolutionary perspective and leadership. In the 1968–75 period, however, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) was engaged in an ongoing struggle against Pabloite revisionism.

"The ICFI today has not only decisively defeated this revisionist current within its ranks but has established the *World Socialist Web Site* as our internet publication, which addresses the crisis of leadership of the international working class on a daily basis," Dias said.

David North's book, the speaker said, is a withering exposure of the falsifications concocted by the enemies of revolutionary Marxism who attempt to drive a wedge between the working class and the international revolutionary party. It is therefore "a weapon" in future revolutionary struggles.

"Fundamental to the victory of the Russian Revolution of 1917 was the decisive role played by the Bolshevik Party led by

Lenin and Trotsky,” Dias said.

Lenin’s 1903 pamphlet *What is to be Done?* the speaker said, declared war on “economism”—the ideological foundation of the unions—and explained that trade union consciousness was “bourgeois consciousness” and did not challenge private ownership of the productive forces and the capitalist state.

“We stand shoulder to shoulder with Lenin,” Dias said, “when we say that the workers must break from the unions, which act as an arm of the bourgeoisie within the workers’ movement, and establish independent class organs, such as Action Committees, as a vehicle to build the revolutionary party.”

The speaker quoted from two of the book’s chapters—“Reform and Revolution in the Epoch of Imperialism” and “Why are Trade Unions hostile to Socialism”—to explain the historical origins and development of trade unions and the role it plays.

Dias reviewed the unions’ betrayal of the estate workers’ wage strike. This experience, he said, demonstrates that workers cannot win elementary wage demands, job security or social rights through the unions. The unions accepted government and employers’ lies that the plantations were running at a loss and stood by the employers when they said wages would be lifted by 200 rupees. In reality, daily pay was only increased by just 20 rupees.

“The real situation is that the transnational corporations which sit at the head of plantation companies still make huge profits, despite the recessionary conditions in the world market,” he said and reviewed by the massive profits made by these corporations.

The unions defend all this, he said. “This is why the SEP says that the workers must break from the unions and establish Action Committees comprised of democratically elected delegates. This issue is raised not just in plantations but throughout Sri Lanka in every section of the working class.”

After the meeting, Abbotsleigh action committee president P. Suntharalingam said workers had to study *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century* and be politically educated on the lessons elaborated in it.

“I learnt a lot of new things from the meeting,” he said. “SEP leader Wije Dias explained how the profit was accumulated by the management and workers face indecent conditions on the other hand. As he said, now the capitalists deny offering wages for the workers at least to live as slaves.”

S. Balasubramaniam, a victimised worker from Annfield Estate, said, “This is the first time I participated in this type of event. I’ve been to lots of trade union meetings but this was completely different. Workers must learn a lot of things from history. We have to use this book to educate other workers.”

The Jaffna meeting on March 1 was chaired by P. Thirugnana Sambandan with SEP Political Committee member Pani Wijesiriwardena delivering the main address.

“The epoch of wars and revolutions that began with the First

World War in 1914 is not yet over. The international contradictions that led to the world war are even more acute today,” Wijesiriwardena said. “The solution to the crisis facing mankind is international socialism. The first step towards achieving this task began with the 1917 socialist revolution in Russia. That task still remains and can only be achieved by the international working class, under revolutionary leadership.”

Wijesiriwardena said that the US and other imperialist powers are driving towards a catastrophic third world war amidst the global capitalist breakdown which has rapidly unfolded since the 2008 financial collapse. The speaker referred to the escalating danger of war between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

“The US is harnessing India as a strategic partner against China while Beijing has developed ties with Pakistan. The historic rivalry of India and Pakistan is now enmeshed in the geo-political conflict between the US and China and there is a real threat of world conflagration between the major powers,” he said.

The competing national elites in India and Sri Lanka or anywhere on the Indian subcontinent cannot avert war, let alone address any of the democratic and social issues facing the masses. These questions can only be solved by the working class on the basis of the revolutionary socialist and internationalist perspective elaborated in Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution.

Wijesiriwardena stressed David North’s defence of Trotsky’s program in *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century* and urged all those in attendance to purchase the book and seriously study and act on its analysis.



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