Sri Lankan SEP and IYSSE hold successful meeting on India's Kashmir lockdown

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a successful public meeting on the Indian government's state of siege in Kashmir at the Public Library auditorium in Colombo on October 11. About 100 workers, youths, professionals and housewives, including party members and supporters from Colombo and outstations participated.

The government led by the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) ended the special semi-autonomous constitutional status of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), India's only Muslim majority state, by presidential fiat on August 5. Since then the Kashmiri population of 13 million has been under an unprecedented security lockdown and communication blackout in violation of their basic democratic rights. In addition to the 500,000 Indian troops already deployed, tens of thousands more troops and paramilitary groups have been sent into J&K.

Pani Wijesiriwardena, the SEP's candidate in the upcoming presidential election in Sri Lanka, chaired the meeting and pointed out dangerous implications of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's moves for the broader South Asian region.

"The Modi government is determined to have the upper hand in its strategic competition with its rivals in the region, Pakistan and China, by subjugating J&K to its direct rule. The Kashmir issue once again threatens war between South Asia's nuclear armed rivals India and Pakistan. If it happens, the US, which does everything to align India as a counterweight to China, would take sides with India, while Pakistan's involvement could trigger China to intervene. In this context, Kashmir remains a geopolitical flashpoint."

Revolutionary greetings were sent to the meeting by Indian and Pakistan supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

Indian Trotskyists denounced the Modi government's actions in Kashmir. "The only revolutionary and progressive solution to the myriad of social and national problems lies in the elimination of 1947-1948 reactionary state structures created as part of the post-war settlement and the establishment of a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia as part of the struggle for world socialism.

"We, the ICFI supporters in India, pledge to collaborate in achieving this revolutionary Trotskyist perspective under the political leadership of the ICFI and its Sri Lankan section, the SEP, which embodies the enormous political experience and principled struggles for Trotskyism against all hostile political tendencies."

The Pakistan Trotskyists criticized the Modi government for its brutal military crackdown in Kashmir, adding: "Since Pakistan's inception, its venal ruling elite has sought to manipulate the mass alienation from New Delhi among the Muslims of Kashmir to further its own reactionary agenda. This included, after New Delhi suppressed the mass protest that erupted against its rigging of the 1987 state election, sidelining the secular Kashmiri nationalists, and providing arms and other logistical support to Islamist anti-Indian Kashmiri insurgents."

The message concluded: "The only way forward for the working class of Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and all South Asia is to build an anti-war movement, as part of a global anti-war movement, based on a socialist internationalist program against imperialism, and all factions of the rival ruling classes and their intrigues in Kashmir and beyond."

Deepal Jayasekera, SEP assistant secretary, delivered the main report. He pointed out that the Modi government's military lockdown and communication shutdown were to suppress popular opposition against its anti-democratic abrogation of Articles 370 and 35 A of the Constitution, which granted Jammu and Kashmir special semi-autonomous status.

He continued: "The main aims of the Modi government in its moves in Kashmir were to bring a bloody end to the Kashmiri armed resistance and establish New Delhi's complete domination over Jammu and Kashmir, to strengthen its geo-political status in the region against its rivals, Pakistan and China and, last but not least, to boost its anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan chauvinist campaign in order to divert and suppress any opposition to its economic and political policies, particularly its austerity measures."

Jayasekera declared: "The Modi government's moves are not just directed against the Kashmiri people, although they are the immediate target, but the working class as a whole. The Modi government clearly knows that its aggressive economic reform will provoke social struggles involving millions of the workers and rural toilers. It will use dictatorial measures as in Kashmir to brutally suppress those developing struggles."

The Modi government's moves in Kashmir have received broad support within the Indian political establishment including from the opposition Congress party, and have been backed by the Supreme Court. Jayasekera commented that "they all share the same reactionary geo-political aims and support the preparations being made against growing opposition of the working [people]."

In dealing with the role of the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, Jayasekera referred to its booklet entitled "Kashmir Betrayed".

"While the booklet criticises the Modi government's draconian moves in Kashmir, their criticisms are based on upholding and defending the Indian bourgeois state and its constitution which they hail as 'secular' and 'democratic'," he said.

"Their criticisms are made from a narrow nationalist point of view

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of defending India's 'national interests'—that is, the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie. They are completely silent on the dangerous implications for the Indian working class. There is no reference to the dangerous international consequences of a major military conflagration involving major world powers."

Jayasekera explained that the Stalinist policies on Kashmir are bound up with, and flow from, their treacherous historical role in politically subordinating the working class to various bourgeois parties—Congress and various regionally-based parties—and to the bourgeois state.

The speaker warned that the BJP government's moves in Kashmir have led to an escalation of geo-political tensions of India, particularly with Pakistan and also China. He referred to the bellicose remarks of BJP ministers and India's army chief about India's possible annexation of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Noting the support by the US and other Western powers for the Modi government's actions, Jayasekera commented: "They all see India as an important military-strategic partner against China. Their attitude to the current situation in Kashmir also exposes their hypocritical invoking of 'human rights' and 'democracy' whenever it is useful for covering up their interventions, including military adventures. At the same time, they use similar measures in their own countries to deal with growing social opposition."

In conclusion the speaker explained that the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is historically rooted in the 1947 communal partition of British India into a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu-dominated India by the departing colonial rulers in league with both rival factions of the national bourgeoisie—Congress and the Muslim League—with the support of the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI).

The continuing crisis over Kashmir once again shows the correctness of Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution which demonstrated the organic incapability of the national bourgeoisie in the backward countries to address any of the issues of the democratic revolution, including the establishment of national unity. It was only the Trotskyist Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI), the Indian section of the Fourth International, that opposed the 1947 partition and called for the unity of workers. Today, this legacy is carried forward by the ICFI.

SEP general secretary Wije Dias emphasized that the SEP had held the meeting on the Kashmir crisis in the midst of the Sri Lankan presidential election campaign, because the issue was of crucial importance for the working class and youth locally, regionally and internationally.

"Kashmir is a region that has had strategic value for a long time in history. By the 19th century the area bordered Persia to the west, Afghanistan and Russia to the north, China to the north-east, Tibet to the east and the Indian sub-continent to the south. British imperialists were eager to hold this land through perjury, bribes, deceit and daylight robbery because of its strategic value."

Dias said: "Today, under conditions of tense international relations, particularly due to the aggressive imperialist policy of the US against China, the strategic significance of Kashmir has heightened. The land of Kashmir and its surroundings got ripped into two parts in 1948, one declaring allegiance to India and the other to Pakistan. This was as a result of the machinations of the traditional Kashmiri king Hari Singh, the head of the Delhi government Jawaharlal Nehru and the British architect of the partition of India, Lord Mountbatten. India's latest intervention in Kashmir flows from the new role it has assumed as the policeman of the region on behalf of the US."

"The brutal repression by the Modi government against the Kashmiri people is making the region as a testing ground for the wholesale subjugation of the working class. Indian workers have begun to join the wave of international working class struggles in opposition to the attacks on social and democratic rights by capitalist governments. This is where the need arises, with utmost urgency, for an independent alternative strategy for the working class."

Dias condemned the attitude of the Stalinist regime of China towards the ongoing mass repression in Kashmir. Chinese President Xi Jinping is visiting India at this crucial juncture. No doubt he will not even raise a murmur against the anti-democratic acts of the Modi government against the civilian population in Kashmir. The Chinese bourgeois regime follows its predecessors in Moscow in the 1930s by appealing for support from imperialist powers. Fearing the working class more than anything else, the Stalinists formed popular fronts with bourgeois forces in Europe to save themselves from Nazi attack.

"Today the Chinese bureaucracy also fears militant action by workers and throw their weight behind the reactionary ruling classes around the world to try to prevent imperialist aggression. By supporting the pro-imperialist governments in the region, including the Modi government and its Pakistan counterpart headed by Imran Khan, they are engaged in the futile exercise of trying to mitigate the aggression by Washington."

Dias appealed to the audience to intensify efforts to mobilize the working class, independently of all bourgeois parties and the fake left supporters, on the basis of an international socialist perspective. This perspective was tested out by the Russian working class in October 1917 which rallied the multi-million rural poor to take political power under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. The Fourth International embodies the strategic lessons of that revolutionary experience.

"Building the Socialist Equality party in Sri Lanka and the founding of sections of the ICFI in every country in the region, including through the transformation of its supporters' groups in Pakistan and India, must be undertaken with the necessary urgency. These are the tasks we insist upon during our election campaign," Dias said.

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