

IYSSE (Sri Lanka) meeting discusses US debacle in Afghanistan

Our correspondents
15 September 2021

Last Friday, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held an online public lecture entitled, “The debacle of US imperialism in Afghanistan.” The event attracted almost 100 people with several dozen more watching on the Socialist Equality Party’s Facebook page. The video has so far been viewed by over 1,000 people and shared more than 200 times.

Students participated from almost all universities in Sri Lanka, including the Colombo, Sri Jayawardenepura, Peradeniya, Jaffna and Sabaragamuwa campuses, an indication that young people are looking for a serious analysis of crucial international developments.

IYSSE convener and SEP political committee member Kapila Fernando chaired the meeting. He stressed that young people and workers needed to understand the root cause of US imperialism’s two-decade “war on terror” in Afghanistan and the reasons for its humiliating defeat.

SEP political committee member Saman Gunadasa gave the main lecture. He began by explaining the brutal conditions imposed on the Afghan population during the two-decade US-led occupation. Indiscriminate bombing by US forces, he said, killed more than 170,000 Afghan civilians, and included direct attacks on hospitals and even weddings. These war crimes also included the kidnapping and torture of people in secret locations.

The US invasion created tens of thousands of refugees and led to half the population requiring humanitarian assistance. This devastation, Gunadasa said, generated boiling hatred among the masses and paved the way for the Taliban to overthrow the US-created Afghan puppet state with little difficulty.

“The debacle in Afghanistan is the most humiliating

defeat suffered by US imperialism since its defeat in Vietnam,” the speaker said. He referenced President Joe Biden’s speech which listed the damage and US military casualties, and the huge cost of the war. Biden justified the US war, however, and failed to mention the massive destruction suffered by the Afghan masses.

Gunadasa reviewed the historical and political events that led to the invasion of Afghanistan. He pointed out that even though none of the perpetrators of the September 11, 2001, terror attack on New York and Washington were Afghans, the US government used it as a pretext to invade the Central Asian nation.

Afghanistan had long been a centre of imperialist intrigue and neo-colonial conspiracies. The speaker noted Washington’s backing for Islamic extremist organisations, including the predecessors of Al Qaeda, during the war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

US imperialism reacted to the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991 by increasingly using its military to try and reassert its declining hegemony. But none of the fundamental problems confronting American capitalism were resolved through war, despite the killing of millions of people and the destruction of entire societies, such as Iraq and Libya.

Gunadasa referred to Fredrick Engels, who had explained that “even though the military is equipped with modern weapons, military strategy will not be able to overcome the economic woes.”

No one should be under any illusion that the debacle in Afghanistan will mean an end to US-led wars and military aggression, the speaker warned. Biden made clear that his administration wants to free its hands of Afghanistan in order to effectively focus on more important military interventions. This meant targeting China and other rivals, such as Russia, along with Iran,

North Korea and other countries, Gunadasa explained.

Referring to the newly-formed Taliban administration in Afghanistan, Gunadasa said the new regime could not overcome the devastation inflicted on the masses during the 20-year war but would turn to international finance capital in order to ruthlessly exploit the country's cheap labour and resources.

The UK foreign secretary has expressed Britain's willingness to be flexible with the new regime, the speaker noted, and Indian big business had already invested in Afghanistan during the US military occupation.

India's Modi government is now looking to have some arrangement to secure those investments, Gunadasa said. Pakistan, a traditional ally of the Taliban organisation, is making overtures to US imperialism, suggesting it be a mediator between the new Afghan government and US imperialist interests.

Gunadasa noted that Sri Lanka's Rajapakse government had hurriedly issued a cautious statement advising the Taliban to protect human rights but was nervously wondering what Washington's next moves would be in the region. The cash-strapped Colombo administration, which continues to turn to Beijing for loans and other financial assistance, is under increasing pressure from the US to sever its relations with China.

Gunadasa concluded by noting that the US debacle in Afghanistan has exploded the myth of the invincibility of imperialism in the consciousness of millions of workers throughout the planet.

"That consciousness of the working class, however, must be developed and directed into the building of a global anti-war movement based on socialism in order to stop all imperialist wars," he concluded.

Gunadasa answered several questions asked after his lecture. Referring to organisations advocating for the protection of women's rights in Afghanistan, he explained that these rights could not be won by appealing to imperialism.

"If the imperialists were interested in any kind of 'humanitarianism,' would they have waged a two-decade war in Afghanistan, destroying the lives of thousands of children and women?" he asked. The rights of any community, he said, can be defended only through a struggle to defeat imperialism by a socialist movement led by the working class.

Gunadasa also answered a question about the

Taliban's rise to power and its impact on the spread of religious extremism. The US-led imperialist powers were the main culprits in promoting and sponsoring religious extremism and used it for their own destructive interests, he explained. The working class, the speaker stressed, was the social force that could unite the masses in the struggle for socialist internationalism and to put an end to religious, ethnic and other forms of discrimination.



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