

Sri Lankan SEP holds its Third National Congress

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held its Third National Congress on May 14-16. Party members throughout the island participated in this important event, which was held online due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic.

The SEP congress was held under extraordinary political conditions in Sri Lanka amid an immense global crisis of capitalism which has been intensified by the pandemic, the US-NATO proxy war against Russia and the international upsurge of the class struggle.

The government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka as a whole have plunged into unprecedented economic, political and social crisis, confronting weeks of mass protests and strikes by workers, youths and rural toilers demanding Rajapakse's resignation.

David North, the chairman of the WSWs International Editorial Board and SEP (US) national chairman, addressed the congress, delivering greetings on behalf of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the SEP (US). The other sections of the ICFI also sent greetings to the congress, which were read out.

Pointing to "the most extraordinary circumstances" under which the congress was being held, North said: "In our view, you confront within Sri Lanka a political crisis with unprecedented dimensions. That crisis itself in Sri Lanka is unfolding within the greatest global crisis of world capitalism since the end of the World War II."

He continued: "The fundamental challenge which this Congress confronts is to clearly define the attitude of the Sri Lankan section of the IC to the events and of course to the developing revolutionary crisis within Sri Lanka itself. In another sense, the Congress which you are presently holding has many similarities to the Congress of the Bolshevik Party in April 1917, the first Congress that was held after Lenin's return to Russia amid a revolutionary crisis. In the midst of a global war, the challenge for the [Bolshevik] party was to define a political orientation, political program and perspective that provided the necessary leadership to the working class."

North pointed out that Lenin's struggle in that congress of the Bolshevik Party was to reorient the party on the basis of the Theory of Permanent Revolution, setting the party on the path of revolution, i.e. to bring it to power.

North explained: "In determining the policy of the party in Sri Lanka, under conditions of exceptional crisis, we first understand that it is all the more necessary to place this crisis within its international context... Our starting point is never the national, but rather the international framework... Only on that basis, only on the international context within which the crisis in Sri Lanka is unfolding, is it possible to arrive at the necessary revolutionary orientation for the working class."

After extensive discussion, the congress unanimously adopted the main perspective resolution, "The pandemic, the global crisis of capitalism, the resurgence of the class struggles and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)" and an emergency resolution, "The popular uprising against the Rajapakse government and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party."

The main resolution pledged the SEP "to vigorously fight for the scientific strategy of elimination of COVID-19 pandemic, and the program against imperialist war preparation, and to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)."

After noting the ICFI's comparison of the pandemic with World War I, the resolution explained how the ruling classes of warring imperialist powers had continued with war despite its horrors as any negotiated settlement would undermine their geopolitical and economic interests. Only the intervention of the Russian working class under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party by seizing power and beginning the socialist transformation of the world brought the war to an end.

The document continued: "Today, the working class—internationalised as never before under the globalisation of production—in imperialist countries as well as in the countries with belated capitalist development, such as India and Sri Lanka, joins struggles, in a far advanced systemic crisis of capitalism, and faces the same task of overthrowing capitalism and taking the path of the socialist transformation of the world."

The resolution exposed the two types of policies carried out by the governments around the world in response to the pandemic: "herd immunity," which says if the virus spread unchecked it will eventually exhaust itself, and "mitigation" of the impact of the pandemic through vaccination and masking which is in fact a modification of herd immunity. Both have failed to stop the spread of the virus and instead led to a global surge of COVID-19 with dangerous new variants.

"In contrast to the strategies of herd immunity and mitigation, the ICFI supports the scientific strategy of ending the pandemic. It is based on policies advanced by the foremost epidemiologists, virologists and other scientists and entails the universal coordinated deployment of every weapon in the arsenal of measures to combat COVID-19," the resolution stated.

The document explained that the major imperialist powers, led by the US, have been aggressively pursuing their reactionary geopolitical interests during the deadly pandemic, posing the threat of world war. "The danger of a Third World War, the global pandemic and social disaster can only be prevented by mobilizing the international working

class, that is, by building a socialist movement of the international working class on the lines advanced by the ICFI in its statement *Socialism and the Fight Against War*, issued on February 18, 2016.”

The resolution noted that last December marked “30 years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy. It has vast implications and lessons for the working class now coming to decisive battles against capitalism internationally, without which it cannot achieve its historical tasks of socialist revolution.”

The document explained that only the ICFI had been able to predict the dissolution of the Soviet Union, contrary to all the agents of both imperialism and Stalinism, as it was based on Leon Trotsky’s analysis of the counter-revolutionary role of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Trotsky had warned that if the Soviet working class did not overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy in a political revolution and re-establish its power as a part of world socialist revolution, the bureaucracy would dissolve the Soviet Union and restore capitalism.

The resolution dealt extensively with the immense economic, political and social crisis confronting bourgeois rule in South Asia as a part of the global crisis of capitalism, which had been greatly intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the reactionary policies of governments in the region. These included their criminal response to the pandemic, harsh austerity measures, lining up behind the imperialist war drive and moves to dictatorial forms of rule, all of which had fuelled the emergence of class struggle in the region as a part of global upsurge of the working class.

The document drew the political conclusion: “The crisis intensified by the pandemic has once again proved the historical unviability of the states created in 1947-1948 in South Asia under the so-called independence. This state system was set up as part of the post-war settlement between the imperialist powers and the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy with the connivance of the national bourgeoisie... Sri Lanka was established as a separate state. The only way out for the multi-millions of workers and poor in South Asia is to overthrow the reactionary states and the rule of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia as part of a world socialist federation.”

The resolution analysed the crisis of the Sri Lankan government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and bourgeois rule, the shift towards autocratic rule and the development of class struggles in detail, placing them in an international context.

In its concluding section on “The tasks of the Socialist Equality Party,” the document elaborated an independent revolutionary program for the working class in Sri Lanka and South Asia based on the Trotskyist Theory of the Permanent Revolution. That perspective “envisages that in the countries of belated capitalist development such as India and Sri Lanka, the national bourgeoisie cannot address the democratic tasks and social questions of the masses... Only the united working class, leading poor farmers and the oppressed masses, can address those historical tasks by establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat as part of world socialist revolution.”

The emergency resolution stated: “The current extraordinary political situation in Sri Lanka can properly be understood only by placing it in the context of the immense crisis of global capitalism, highly intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing US-NATO proxy war against Russia. A correct political orientation of the party towards the growing popular movement of workers, youths and rural toilers in Sri Lanka can only be developed through such an international approach.”

Explaining the significance of the popular uprising against the

Rajapakse government in which the working class has begun to play a central role, the resolution elaborated an independent revolutionary program for the working class to fight for a government of workers and peasants, which will be committed to socialist policies, as a part of the broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

In his remarks at the conclusion of the congress discussion, outgoing General Secretary Wije Dias pointed out that the two resolutions discussed in the congress, the reports and all the greetings from the sections of the ICFI, including those by David North, have highlighted the perspectives of international socialism on which the SEP is based.

Commenting on the political situation in Sri Lanka, Dias said: “The installation of [United National Party leader] Ranil Wickremesinghe as the new prime minister is a historic appointment which has made everyone surprised. The political danger of the appointment of an individual who failed to win a vote in the election to parliament and only managed to enter parliament through the national list, to the premiership, the dominant post of the parliament, is now being revealed.”

Dias pointed to the series of meetings that Wickremesinghe held with the Colombo ambassadors from the US and other major powers. He explained those discussions were focused not on demands for financial assistance from those countries to deal with severe scarcity of essentials like fuel as claimed publicly, but on how to integrate Sri Lanka into the US-led military-strategic offensive against Russia and China. Citing US diplomatic cables leaked by Wikileaks, Dias pointed out that the US had recognized Wickremesinghe a long time ago as the foremost agent it could find in Sri Lanka to serve its interests.

Dias explained that the other parties of the bourgeois political establishment, including the opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), were lining up behind Wickremesinghe. He insisted on the necessity of the political and theoretical struggle of the party against various pseudo-left groups that are working to politically subordinate the working class to the bourgeois parties.

He briefly elaborated the SEP’s call and struggle for the formation of workers’ action committees in every factory, workplace, plantation and neighborhood, independent from the unions, and its relationship to the party’s struggle to independently mobilize the working class to establish a government of workers and peasants, which will be committed to socialist policies, as a part of the broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

The congress delegates elected a new central committee. The members of the incoming central committee elected the outgoing general secretary Wije Dias as party chairman, the outgoing assistant secretary Deepal Jayasekera as general secretary, Saman Gunadasa as the new assistant secretary, K. Ratnayake as WSWs national editor, Wasantha Rupasinghe as assistant editor and Vilani Peiris as treasurer.



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