

IYSSE holds well-attended anti-war meeting at Peradeniya University in Sri Lanka

Our correspondents

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On August 22, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a meeting at the University of Peradeniya under the title “The Ukraine War and How to Stop It.” The event, which was sponsored by the Peradeniya University Political Science Association (PSA) at the request of the IYSSE, was attended by over 100 students and about a dozen teachers.

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) Political Committee member Pani Wijesiriwardena delivered the lecture, which was translated into Tamil by Shree Haran, also from the party’s Political Committee.

IYSSE and SEP members campaigned at the campus for about a week prior to the event, explaining to students, teachers and non-academic workers that the US and NATO-led war in Ukraine had provoked the Putin regime to invade Ukraine. They also discussed the growing threat of world war and the international socialist program required to prevent a global conflagration.

Introducing the meeting, the head of the Political Science Department, Professor Upul Abeyratne, said: “The Socialist Equality Party is closely following the world political developments... Karl Marx said ‘Workers of the World Unite’ in the *Communist Manifesto*. This has two implications. One is that mankind has a common heritage. Secondly, it means going beyond communal divisions and that the world’s working people must unite.”

He thanked the SEP for proposing an anti-war meeting at the university, which was multi-ethnic and multi-religious, and showed the way to unite. Professor Abeyratne also criticised so-called leftists who worked to divide workers on a racial basis and urged the students to seriously consider what the SEP had to say.

IYSSE convener Kapila Fernando, who chaired the meeting, thanked Professor Abeyratne, Sumudu Walakulu, a senior lecturer in the faculty, and the PSA for sponsoring the meeting.

Andre Damon from the US SEP sent video greetings, which were screened during the meeting. The *World Socialist Web Site* will publish a full version of his video message, with Sinhala and Tamil subtitles, in coming days.

Wijesiriwardena began his speech by showing photographs of IYSSE anti-war meetings held internationally since the Ukraine war began. He explained that the Peradeniya University meeting was part of a global campaign to build an anti-war movement of workers and youth.

Wijesiriwardena noted recent reports by US intelligence services about the failure of the “Spring Offensive” by Ukraine forces, noting, “US imperialism cannot afford any failure in its military and geopolitical aims. The Biden administration is preparing to send F-16 fighter jets and cluster bombs to Ukraine. It has approved \$US113 billion for the war, including \$70 billion just for weapons.”

The speaker warned that the most consequential factor in the war was that US and Russia held 70 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons.

War cannot be explained by “who fired the first shot” but only by understanding its origins, Wijesiriwardena said, and outlined the historical expansion of NATO and its encirclement of Russia.

There are two intertwined factors, he continued. “One is the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Second is the declining economic power of the US relative to its global competitors, and its efforts to offset that decline by using its enormous military power.

“In 2014, the US conspired to oust Ukraine’s pro-Russian former president, Viktor Yanukovich, and install one of its own allies. Later president-elect Zelensky followed the same line of that political conspiracy and then Washington pushed Zelensky to create border conflicts with Russia.

“Putin responded to these provocations of US imperialism by invading Ukraine and doing exactly what the imperialists had hoped for,” Wijesiriwardena said.

“That Ukraine and Russia face each other as two rival states in this bloody catastrophe is a direct result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Putin regime, which hates the legacy of the October Revolution, and represents the Russian oligarchy which was created with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the looting of its resources.”

Wijesiriwardena reviewed Russia’s natural resources and quoted from Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*: “The more capitalism develops, the more the need for raw materials arises, the more bitter competition becomes, and the more feverishly the hunt for raw materials proceeds all over the world, the more desperate becomes the struggle for the acquisition of colonies.”

Wijesiriwardena said that the central aim of the US and European imperialist powers was to exploit Russia’s vast natural resources. He also pointed out that China, the major economic rival of the US, was the main geo-strategic target of the US in the intensifying war in Ukraine.

The speaker said that India was a major strategic partner in the US-led preparations for war against China. “Washington and New Delhi desperately want to get Sri Lanka, situated in a strategic position in the Indian Ocean, in line with their strategy of encircling China. They are pressuring Colombo to give in to their demands.

“Prime Minister Modi’s statements that Sri Lanka must implement the 13th amendment [to the country’s constitution, which grants limited power sharing to Tamil-dominated provinces] is part of that.”

he said. Wijesiriwardena then reviewed Washington's military preparations with Japan, South Korea and Australia for war against China, stating:

The war drive is a result of the irreconcilable conflict between the globalised economy and the nation-state system in which the profit system is rooted. This war can only be stopped by eliminating the root cause of the war, global capitalism. The only social force capable of this is the international working class. The fight to end the war is the fight for socialism.

Wijesiriwardena concluded by urging students to build the IYSSE and the SEP at Peradeniya University and quoted from Trotsky's speech to the 1937 Dewey Commission:

War has in fact often expedited revolution. But precisely for this reason it has often led to abortive results. War sharpens social contradictions and mass discontent. But that is insufficient for the triumph of the proletarian revolution. Without a revolutionary party rooted in the masses, the revolutionary situation leads to the most cruel defeats.

The lecture was followed by an animated question and answer session. One student asked: "Ukraine and Russia were member states of the USSR. If these two countries unite again can the war be ended?"

Wijesiriwardena replied:

The 1917 October Revolution was the first step towards a world federation of socialist republics and the elimination of the capitalist nation state system. After the October Revolution, in December 1922, the USSR was created on a voluntary basis, uniting Russia, Ukraine and other countries.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy saw the Stalinist-backed Russian oligarchy establish its capitalist state and Ukraine became a separate capitalist state. Zelensky, Ukraine's current president, is an imperialist proxy and helping the US-NATO to subjugate Russia.

These countries cannot unite on the basis of capitalism. That is why we call for the unity of the working class in both countries and the fight for a Union of Russian and Ukrainian Socialist Republics as part of the struggle for international socialism and the overthrow of both capitalist regimes.

M.M. Ihjas, a senior lecturer of the Political Science Department praised the lecture and asked: "What is the SEP's attitude towards China, which resorted to vast private investments?"

Wijesiriwardena explained that Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) which led the revolution in 1949 were based on "socialism in one country," a reactionary theory advanced in the 1920s by Joseph Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy. This anti-Marxist

theory was in opposition to the program of world socialist revolution as advanced by Lenin and Trotsky and on which the Russian Revolution was based.

He added:

In the aftermath of the 1949 Revolution, the CCP was compelled to abolish the private ownership of property. However, in 1989, the Chinese bureaucracy crushed the upsurge of workers and young people over its anti-democratic rule and a worsening economic crisis and opened its doors to foreign investment.

The US is making war preparation against China even as it seeks to subjugate Russia. The Chinese bureaucracy led by Xi Jinping has no progressive solution to imperialist war but is seeking allies, including Putin, for a military alliance. Only the international working class can advance a policy against the developing war danger.

Following the meeting many students expressed their eagerness to have further discussions with IYSSE members. A second-year political science student commented:

The lecture pointed out the devastation caused by war and its dangerous implications. I was able to understand and get confidence in SEP's political program from the lecture. However, I had issues on how to bring this program to the masses and would like to discuss this with the SEP.

What was said in the lecture about the political organisations currently dominating universities is correct. The student union leaders are hostile to this type of program, and their politics have no solutions to these problems.

The critical issues of war and revolution do not occur to them. The lecturer explained that last year's popular uprising was defeated due to a lack of working-class leadership. The solution to war and other problems is to provide this sort of leadership.



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