

Enthusiastic response to campaign for Sri Lankan Centenary of Trotskyism meetings

Our reporters
5 December 2023

Joseph Kishore, the National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the US, is to visit Sri Lanka to speak at meetings organised by the SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) to commemorate the centenary of Trotskyism.

Kishore has been the SEP (US) National Secretary since 2008 and is a regular writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, published by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). He was the SEP's presidential candidate in the 2020 US elections.

The first of these two meetings, entitled "Leon Trotsky and the fight for socialism in the 21st century," will be held on December 7, courtesy of the Political Science Association of Peradeniya University at room number 86 in the university, while the second will be held at the New Town Hall in Colombo on December 10.

The campaign for the meetings is being conducted by the SEP and IYSSE, explaining the century-long fight by the Trotskyist movement to defend and develop Marxism, and its contemporary relevance for the struggle for international socialism. It has attracted an enthusiastic response from workers and youth.

Published below are some of the remarks made by students, academics and non-academic workers at Peradeniya University.

Chamil, an Arts Faculty student, said: "I participated in two lectures held by the IYSSE at this university recently. I first came to know about Trotsky and the movement he built from the lecture on the Ukraine war.

"Those lectures pointed out that the danger of world war and the attacks on our rights could be stopped through a fight for international socialism against capitalism. I agreed with that.

"Through today's discussion, I came to know that these points had been explained by Trotsky even at the turn of the 20th century. However, I have a question about whether this type of program can win the workers to its side, considering the power of the rulers, including their media."

The campaigners pointed out that while the capitalist rulers

had such power, when the working class joined last year's popular uprising in Sri Lanka that attracted millions of people, it expressed its enormous strength. As a result, former President Gotabhaya Rajapakse was forced to flee the country.

Chamil responded: "Yes it makes clear that the working class possesses such power. But after Rajapakse, now President Ranil Wickremesinghe is implementing the privatisation of health, education and other sectors. Protests are being suppressed, using the police."

SEP and IYSSE members explained that pseudo-left groups, like the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), and the trade unions betrayed the mass uprising by subordinating it to the demand for an "interim government" promoted by bourgeois opposition parties like the Samagi Jana Balawegaya and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. That betrayal paved the way for the Wickremesinghe government.

The discussion then turned to the role played by the Bolshevik Party under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky in the 1917 Russian Revolution. Chamil added: "I now understand that the Russian Revolution was successful because there was the Bolshevik Party. In order to get more clarification, I will participate in the lecture."

Sujith, another Arts Faculty student, commented: "I accept that the war cannot be stopped without mobilising the international working class and that only your movement works for it. I think social media should creatively be used to bring your movement to the masses."

Campaigners described how the SEP and IYSSE work to bring the Trotskyist perspective and program to workers and youth by utilising the WSWs and social media. They pointed out the necessity of developing a cadre armed with Trotskyism, the Marxism of the 21st century.

Sujith responded: "Actually, we have to think about what we should bring into the workers and youth, as you say. I accept that a cadre armed with Trotskyism is needed for it. I have understood in this discussion that the revolutionary class in the society is the working class and that the students should turn to the working class and fight for socialism

under its leadership to win their demands.”

Ruchira, a Science Faculty student, said: “Even though I had heard the name of Trotsky, I did not know that he had played such an enormous role in history. With your explanation, I understand one thing. That is, the dangerous wars confronting everyone in the world, unemployment, poverty, pandemics and the destruction of environment, i.e. every issue we face, has its roots in capitalism and the outmoded nation-state system.

“Wars in the Middle East and in Ukraine, and other problems have only one solution in the world. That is the unification of the international working class on a socialist program to abolish the capitalist system and its nation-state system. Even though it seems to be a difficult task at once, we see in the news how youth, students and the majority of masses are engaged in protests demanding an end to the wars. So I think we can succeed. Definitely, I will come to the meeting on December 7.”

Vimukthi, an engineering student, joined the discussion, explaining the difficulties confronting university students.

“Those students who do not have hostel facilities have to find outside accommodation facilities, paying at least 5,000 rupees (\$US15.20) per month. The majority of such students have to take low-priced vegetarian meals from university canteens.

“The combined expenditure for a month for rent, meals and other costs is at least 15,000 to 20,000 rupees. Parents cannot afford such spending due to the sky-rocketing cost of living. Therefore, we have been forced to take part-time jobs. It is a barrier to our education.”

Vimukthi also said that even though students would be able to get a degree, they face the issue of finding a job. He and other young people were searching for solutions for these problems.

“As you explained, it is crystal clear that solutions for problems cannot be found under capitalism, which is in its death agony. The international socialist solution that your movement is advocating is logical. To get more clarification, I will come to the December 7 meeting with my friend.”

After SEP and IYSSE members explained the title of the December 7 lecture and its content to a group of final year students in the Department of Psychology, one female student said:

“When you said that all the critical problems that mankind faced in the last century have reemerged acutely, I found it difficult to understand why they were unable to be solved in that century. I understood that although Trotsky and his movement were continuously fighting and presenting an international socialist program, it could not be realised because other movements worked among workers around the world against Trotsky’s program. As the present

generation, we should know these historical facts. So we will participate in the meeting.”

Chathuranga, a non-academic worker at the university’s Distance Learning Department, said that without a political program he had been confused how to stop the attacks by the Wickremesinghe government. Now he saw the light after hearing the international socialist program presented by the Trotskyist movement.

He added: “The trade unions demanded only an increase of 20,000 rupees [in monthly salary], while our monthly income’s real value is so low. They did not discuss with us before deciding that amount. Now at least 50,000 rupees per month should be added to our basic salary. Otherwise we cannot live.

“The government has only given an allowance of 10,000 rupees in the budget. The trade unions paved the way for the government to offer such a meagre amount. The government and the trade unions are working in unison. Therefore, we do not have any faith in the unions.

“I agree with your explanation that our problems cannot be solved under the capitalist system. I have understood it through my recent experience. We have to take forward the struggle for action committees as our own fighting organisations. I will talk to my colleagues about this and try to convince them to participate in the lecture on December 7.”

Ahmed, a lecturer in the university’s ICT department, said: “I am totally opposed to the genocide in Gaza. Appealing to the United Nations, an agency of imperialists who give their full backing to this genocide, to stop the war is utterly futile. I met you while I was thinking about how to stop this brutal attack [on Gaza]. Your idea that this genocide can be stopped by fighting for a United Socialist Republic of the Middle East through the unity of Arab and Jewish workers is logical.”



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