

SEP (US) National Secretary Joe Kishore addresses “Centenary of Trotskyism” public meeting at Sri Lanka’s Peradeniya University

Our reporters
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On Thursday afternoon, Joe Kishore, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the US, addressed a well-attended public meeting at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka.

Over 70 students, workers and academics attended the meeting, which was sponsored by the university’s Political Science Association. A delegation of Tamil-speaking plantation workers travelled from the Hatton area in the island’s main plantation region, to participate in the meeting. Kishore’s speech was delivered in English and translated into Sinhala from the podium, with the text translated into Tamil displayed on a video screen.

Kishore is currently in Sri Lanka to speak at public meetings titled “Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the 21st Century.” Organised by the SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), Kishore will address another meeting on the same theme at the New Town Hall in Colombo at 3 p.m. on Sunday, December 10.

Kishore began his address on Thursday by commenting on the current international situation and emphasised the critical importance for workers and youth to base their struggles on an international perspective.

“It is impossible to develop an orientation in any particular country based on the national peculiarities of that country,” he told the meeting. A national orientation, he explained will lead “to opportunist and bankrupt conclusions” because “we live and fight within the framework of a global capitalist system, and workers and young people at every point confront global issues.”

Kishore detailed the ongoing genocidal attacks against Palestinians in Gaza by Israel’s right-wing Netanyahu regime with the active support of US and its NATO allies. The Gaza war and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, he stressed, are “two fronts in a rapidly

escalating world war.”

The speaker elaborated on the rapidly increasing shift by the ruling classes around world towards dictatorial forms of rule and the utter rottenness of bourgeois democracy.

“The most significant factor in the present situation is the resurgence of the most basic and powerful of all social forces, the working class,” he said, and explained the emergence of working-class struggles and strikes internationally, particularly in the US and Europe.

“Everywhere workers and youth are confronted with a situation that raises the necessity for revolutionary solutions, on a global scale,” Kishore said. “This necessarily raises fundamental political and historical questions. What is socialism? What happened in the 20th century? Was there an alternative to Stalinism?”

Kishore elaborated on the 100-year struggle waged by Trotskyist movement for the perspective and program of international socialism, starting with the founding of the Left Opposition under the leadership of Leon Trotsky in October 1923, the establishment of the Fourth International in 1938 and the formation of the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1953 to fight the liquidationist Pabloite tendency that had emerged in the Fourth International.

The *World Socialist Web Site* will publish a detailed report on the Peradeniya University meeting next week.

SEP/IYSSE teams have campaigned widely for the meetings, including at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts and the Moratuwa and Jayawardanapura universities, and at several workplaces. Teams distributed Sinhala- and Tamil-language copies of WSWs articles “SEP (US) national secretary to visit Sri Lanka to speak on the centenary of Trotskyism” and “On the Founding of the Left Opposition.”

A Colombo University political science student told campaigners that he knew about Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin and that the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was the result of Stalin's theory of socialism in one country. He admitted, however, that he did not know much about the Trotskyist movement and its struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The reason such an important figure like Trotsky is not known by many people," he said, is because "he was not allowed to be known." We don't know about the history of the Trotskyist movement because "we are not taught about these things, even at university," he added.

Sudila, who is studying International Relations at Colombo university, said, "Socialism is necessary, but it is not allowed by those who control the economy."

Commenting on the US economy and the international war drive, he said, "The US is selling weapons [to instigate wars]. Iraq was devastated on the basis of bogus claims [of weapons of mass destruction] to support the US economy."

After campaigners explained the underlying reasons for the deepening crisis of the US and world economy, Sudila said: "I understand that there is no remedy under capitalism. The US economy has collapsed, and economic crises are occurring repeatedly. The economy cannot be saved under capitalism."

Referring to the Gaza genocide, he added: "Many lives, including children, are being lost and just recently a university was totally destroyed. This is a game plan, mainly used by America, that is being implemented."

"To stop all of this socialism must be established, as you explain," he said, "but we are not taught in schools about such things as the Russian Revolution. We understand that we are being dragged along the wrong path, but I'd not heard of the Russian working class taking power."

SEP/IYSSE campaigners spoke with Colombo port workers at Bloemanthal Harbour accommodation quarters. **A female worker**, who wished to be anonymous because of the repressive situation at the Colombo port, said that she wondered about the dissolution of the USSR.

"At that time, I thought there was socialism there but then it was broken apart. I was surprised that this could happen to such a large state. My father used to bring home Soviet magazines, and I used to read them, and so I wondered why this [dissolution] happened."

After hearing an explanation of Trotsky's political fight, beginning in 1923, against rise of Stalinism, the port worker said, that if Trotsky had been victorious against

Stalin, the USSR "would not have been dissolved in 1991 [and] I believe that people like Hitler would not come into power and the Second World War would not have happened.

"If Trotskyism had triumphed, the Gaza issue that we see today would not have arisen and even America would not have been so powerful," she said.

A young Ceylon Electricity Board worker from Bandarawela, 200 km from Colombo, said: "I've heard about Lenin but not read his work and I've never heard of Trotsky and Stalinism. Why aren't we told about this history? If socialism is the only solution to solve all the peoples' problems, then we need to understand this."

R. Sundaram, a plantation worker from the Malvatta division of Eslaby Estate in Bandarawela, said, "The SEP is the only party that talks about socialism. In order to build a better future, you have to learn history. I used to read *Tholilalar Pathei* [the Tamil newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist League, the predecessor of the SEP]. I sometimes read the Tamil section of the WSWS, which is how I got to know about the war in Gaza.

"The trade union leaders do not explain anything about this to us. The unions are helping the companies by increasing our work burdens and thus working to increase company profits. I'm against wars and if people are educated, then people will come forward to build socialism and create peace," he said.

M. A Suriyarachchi, a university student who lives at Bandarawela, said, "I've just heard about Trotskyism from you for the first time in my life. Who can explain this history like you do? People are deceived because they don't know history and they get really bored with politics if they only watch the Sri Lankan news," she said.

Referring to Israel's brutal military attacks against Palestinians in Gaza, she added, "No one agrees with Israel's genocide. We live in a world where people are seen as animals. That must be changed."



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