

Peradeniya University students in Sri Lanka discuss the contemporary relevance of the *Communist Manifesto*

Our reporters
19 February 2024

On February 21, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) (SEP) will hold a lecture at Sri Lanka's Peradeniya University entitled, "A study of the *Communist Manifesto*."

To publicise this week's event, IYSSE and Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members have been holding in-person and online discussions with students, most of whom have voiced their interest in understanding the contents of this historic document, written 176 years ago by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

SEP General Secretary Deepal Jayasekera will present the lecture, the second in a series organised by the IYSSE under the auspices of the University of Peradeniya's Political Science Society.

We publish below some of the students' comments.

Thanosa, a second-year political science student, began by explaining the rising cost of living, unemployment and other worsening social problems facing students.

"Coping with daily expenses is a big problem for university students. We have to pay for accommodation, food and other essential needs but the 5,000-rupee [\$US16] monthly allowance from the Mahapola scholarship is not enough and we do not even get this meagre sum paid on time. The cost of our daily meals is 500 rupees.

"The main issue we face and which our senior graduates are now confronting is joblessness. We certainly can't say that we will get a good job after we graduate from our four-year course.

"The majority of people in Sri Lanka, including students, live in poverty and so the socialist perspective of Marx and Engels, and especially their conception of social equality, is now more important than ever. If

there was social equality then all the problems in society could be solved peacefully," he added.

"I need to come to this lecture and study Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engel's writings because there are a lot of things that we don't know about their analysis. We need to study their perspective so we can learn how to fight for equality. It would be very useful if other intelligent young people joined the fight for socialism."

Hiruni, an archeology student, said: "I was very pessimistic about the situation before I met you because I didn't have a clear understanding of how to overcome the many issues we face.

"We confront problems such as poverty, unemployment, the attack on public education, the suppression of democratic rights and bloody wars taking place in the Middle East and Ukraine. After listening to your explanation of the *Communist Manifesto* and its importance I can see a rational path forward and it has made me optimistic.

"The concepts presented in the *Communist Manifesto*, that 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,' showed me a new direction. We should study Marxism in order to overthrow capitalism, which is an initiative that I support, so I'll attend the lecture and invite all my fellow students to come."

Samadhi, also an archeology student, said: "I'm from Wellassa [a remote part of Uva Province]. This area has a lot of very oppressed peasants and youth but there's no genuine movement to voice their needs, their rights and other issues.

"Youth born and bred in these poor villages are so full of talent and skill, but they have no opportunity or platform to prove themselves, and they also face

continuous police repression. Most of them are not motivated to get a higher education.

“Although I came to university for higher education, I am unsure about a job after graduation. Finding a job is a big problem for those of us who study archeology, especially due to the massive government cuts in allocations to archeology in this country. I think that we can only realise our grievances by replacing capitalism with socialism.”

Shashini, another archeology student, said: “What I understand from your explanation of the *Communist Manifesto* is that the capitalists in this society are exploiting the workers to enrich their wealth. This is the first time that I’ve met a movement which guides and educates us about these things and so I am glad to have met the IYSSE.”

Goshi, a faculty of agriculture student, said: “The wars in Gaza and Ukraine are deepening and spreading day by day. This could develop towards a very serious conflict between the major powers who have nuclear weapons, which could end all life on earth, including that of humans. The problem is that we are not aware of the social power and potential of the working class and that it could intervene and stop war.

“It’s hard to realise that Marx and Engels had already warned people about the many dangers they face now, more than 175 years ago after they wrote the *Communist Manifesto*. I’m very keen to read it because I need to know more and more about this subject.”

In an online discussion organised by the IYSSE on February 16, **Anoya**, a third-year arts faculty student, said: “I accept that the concepts of the *Communist Manifesto* are important to educate the working class. The working class must understand how profit is extracted through their labour but why is the IYSSE and SEP only intervening among university students and not the working class?”

The SEP/IYSSE campaigners explained how the movement continuously fights for its policies amongst the working class, not only in Sri Lanka but internationally, under the leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

“Our perspective rests on the international working class, which, as the *Communist Manifesto* points out, is the powerful and decisive revolutionary social force in capitalist society. Revolutionary consciousness and the

political unity of the international working class, however, do not develop spontaneously.

“The working class need a revolutionary party to educate and organise them to take power from the capitalist ruling elite. Youth and students around the world, including in Sri Lanka, can play a decisive role in that process,” the SEP/IYSSE campaigners explained.

Anoya then asked how workers and students could distinguish fake Marxist organisations from the genuine Marxist parties?

Party campaigners answered by explaining that genuine Marxist parties were based on the fight for internationalism and the political independence of the working class. Even though pseudo-left organisations use Marxist phraseology, they reject the materialist conception of history and the revolutionary role of the working class. Their perspective is to seek a more favourable distribution of wealth within the capitalist system, not to overthrow it.

We urge students, workers and academics to attend this week’s lecture to discuss these questions and any others they have about the *Communist Manifesto* and the fight for socialist internationalism.

Venue: Lecture Hall No. 86, Political Science Department, University of Peradeniya

Date and time: February 21 at 3.00 p.m.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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