

Sri Lankan Trotskyists hold critical meetings on the Tamil translation of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a successful meeting on March 7 at the Colombo Tamil Sangam Hall in Wellawatte to promote the recently published Tamil translation of Leon Trotsky's seminal work, *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?* The IYSSE is the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the world Trotskyist movement.

The March 7 event, which was attended by students, workers and youth, was the final in a series of SEP/IYSSE meetings on the historic Tamil-language edition, which was produced by SEP comrades in France in collaboration with members of other European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International. The first meeting was on February 11 in Hatton, in the central plantation district, and the second on February 26 in Jaffna in the Northern Province.

In the campaign to build the meetings in Hatton and Jaffna, SEP/IYSSE teams visited several schools. They were able to address meetings of students in two of the main schools in those areas. Teachers and students from both schools attended the SEP/IYSSE public meetings.

SEP General Secretary Deepal Jayasekera, who chaired the Colombo meeting, briefly explained the circumstances that led to Trotsky writing the book in 1936. Jayasekera pointed out that Trotsky was the co-leader with V.I. Lenin of the October 1917 revolution in which the Russian working class overthrew bourgeois rule, took power, and established the first workers' state in history.

"Lenin, Trotsky and other leaders of October Revolution never treated the Russian Revolution as a national event," he said. They "considered it the first shot of the world socialist revolution based on the perspective of socialist internationalism." Jayasekera said that the failure of working-class revolutions in several advanced capitalist countries in Europe, including Germany, led to the isolation of the Soviet Union. This created the conditions for the emergence of a bureaucratic caste headed by Joseph Stalin which systematically usurped political power from the working class.

The speaker explained how Trotsky and the Left Opposition

initiated and developed the political and theoretical struggle against this bureaucracy and its reactionary anti-Marxist theory of "socialism in one country."

The Stalinist bureaucracy responded to the struggle waged by the Left Opposition by expelling Trotsky from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and exiling him to Alma Ata in Soviet Kazakhstan, and then deporting him from the Soviet Union.

Under immense difficulties, Trotsky deepened the struggle to defend the internationalist and socialist perspective of the October Revolution against the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy. *The Revolution Betrayed* was a powerful exposure of the counterrevolutionary character of this bureaucracy.

SEP Assistant Secretary Saman Gunadasa, the main speaker, explained how the imperialist powers are dragging the planet into a third world war and said capitalism had survived because of the Stalinist betrayals of the Russian Revolution and the international working class.

Gunadasa's speech referred to the ground-breaking political significance of Trotsky's scientific analysis of the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy, an entirely new social phenomenon, and the conditions that produced it.

He talked about the immense problems facing the Soviet Union following the October Revolution. These included its backward levels of technology, abject poverty and social misery, as well as illiteracy in vast areas of the country.

"The main challenge in this situation," Gunadasa said, "was to develop production in order to meet the needs of all the working people in the Soviet Union." The key to overcoming this challenge was organising the socialist revolution internationally, particularly in the advanced capitalist countries, to overcome the isolation of the Soviet economy.

The speaker described how the Stalinist bureaucracy abandoned the scientific perspective on which the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 was based, and instead advanced the nationalist theory of "socialism in one country."

This reactionary theory, developed by Nicolai Bukharin and promoted by Stalin, renounced Trotsky and the Left Opposition, accusing them of taking the Soviet Union into

unending foreign wars and revolutions, Gunadasa said. The bureaucracy insisted that the Soviet people could build socialism in the Soviet Union, instead of developing the world revolution, the speaker said. He explained that the bureaucracy's theory was in direct opposition to the internationalist program of the socialist movement, going back to the *Communist Manifesto*.

Gunadasa outlined how Trotsky was exiled to Alma Ata and then expelled from the Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands of Bolsheviks, socialists and other opponents of the bureaucracy were framed-up and murdered in the subsequent Moscow show trials.

“Gradually, the bureaucracy transformed itself into the gravedigger, not only of the revolution in the Soviet Union, but of the world revolution. And every working-class defeat strengthened the position of the bureaucracy and paved the way for the further isolation of the Soviet Union,” he stated.

The speaker quoted directly from *The Revolution Betrayed*: “The state assumes directly and from the very beginning a dual character: socialistic, insofar as it defends social property in the means of production; bourgeois, insofar as the distribution of life's goods is carried out with a capitalistic measure of value and all the consequences ensuing therefrom.”

Gunadasa explained how the Stalinist bureaucracy betrayed the international socialist revolution by subordinating international workers' uprisings to what the Stalinist bureaucracy claimed was the “development of socialism” in the Soviet Union. He then reviewed Trotsky's warnings that unless the Soviet working class overthrew the Stalinist regime in a political revolution and took power back into their own hands, the bureaucracy would restore capitalism.

These warnings were vindicated when the Stalinist regime, in the culmination of its decades-long betrayal of the Soviet and international working class, dissolved the Soviet Union in December 1991 and restored capitalism.

This process, which began under Mikhail Gorbachev, was an expression of how the globalisation of production in 1980s had undermined all nationalist economic policies, including those of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The restoration of capitalism was completed under Boris Yeltsin. While these counter-revolutionary attacks were resisted by the working class, the Stalinist bureaucracy's destruction of the Left Opposition in the late 1920s meant there was no genuine socialist and internationalist movement within the Soviet Union to take forward this struggle.

During the meeting's question and answer session, one worker asked whether Leninist ideas and conceptions still prevailed in Russia. Another asked why the Soviets, which had overthrown bourgeois rule in Russia, could not defeat Stalinism.

Responding to the first question, Gunadasa emphasised that the only force fighting for the continuity of Leninism was the Trotskyists and that had Lenin lived, he would have been in the

ranks of Left Opposition. The speaker explained that in Lenin's last struggle, he proposed an alliance with Trotsky to fight the rising bureaucracy and called for the removal of Stalin as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

The speaker said that the liquidation of the Soviet Union paved the way for more than three decades of imperialist aggression, including the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine, Israel's genocidal ethnic-cleansing against Palestinians in Gaza and preparation war against China, and quoted from the WSWS 2024 New Year Statement.

Gunadasa again stressed the contemporary relevance of Trotsky's analysis in *The Revolution Betrayed*, pointing out that the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) was the living continuity of the Left Opposition. He urged the audience to read and carefully consider Trotsky's masterpiece and make the decision to join the ICFI. He also referenced the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists (YGBL), which is working in political solidarity with the ICFI and carrying out a determined struggle for Trotskyism in the working class of the former Soviet Union, including Russia and Ukraine.

Answering the other question, Gunadasa pointed out that the failure of revolutions in Germany and elsewhere was due to the lack of Bolshevik-type parties in those countries. These defeats were used by the Stalinist bureaucracy, which falsely claimed to represent the continuity of the October Revolution, to justify its reactionary theory of “socialism in one country.”

“It should always be kept in mind,” Gunadasa continued, “Stalinism was neither inevitable nor the natural outcome of the Russian Revolution. There was an alternative, put into practice by the Trotskyist opposition, but it was crushed and drowned in blood by the privileged bureaucracy.

“This revolutionary program is epitomised and continued today by the ICFI, the world Trotskyist movement. It embodies the struggle for more than a century by Trotskyists for the continuity of Marxism, in its intransigent struggles against Stalinism, Social Democracy, and all varieties of reactionary nationalism.”



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