

May Day 2025

Crisis in South Asia and the fight for socialism

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11 May 2025

This speech was given by Deepal Jayasekera, General Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka), and M. Thevarajah, Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) Central Committee member, at the International May Day 2025 Online Rally, held Saturday, May 3.

Comrades and friends, South Asia is being dragged into the vortex of geopolitical tensions, with India and Pakistan rapidly moving toward war following India's accusation that Pakistan was responsible for a brutal terror attack in Indian-held Kashmir on April 22.

The two nuclear-armed countries have already fought three wars since 1947, but now their bitter rivalry is dangerously intertwined with US preparations for war with China and threatens to trigger a wider conflict. India is Washington's strategic partner in South Asia while Pakistan is aligned with Beijing.

The Socialist Equality Party is redoubling its efforts to mobilize workers and youth across South Asia as part of a unified anti-war movement of the international working class to put an end to capitalism and the danger of war.

The global crisis of capitalism that is fueling the war drive, a deepening crisis of bourgeois rule and an upsurge in the class struggle, takes an acute form in Sri Lanka. In 2022, the government was forced to default on loans, setting off a catastrophic social crisis that brought millions of workers onto the streets. While the president was forced to flee the country, the political establishment closed ranks and installed Ranil Wickremesinghe, a man with no popular support, who negotiated an IMF loan with draconian austerity terms.

Last year, as Wickremesinghe proved incapable of containing the opposition of the workers and the poor, the ruling class turned, not to the deeply discredited traditional parties, but to the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and its electoral front, the National Peoples Power

(NPP). The JVP, which had never held power, won office by signaling to big business its determination to impose the IMF agenda, while promoting itself as the savior of the nation and promising to end the suffering of the masses.

Its victory was universally welcomed by the political establishment. The international media declared that a "leftist" and "Marxist" party had taken power. The SEP alone warned that the JVP would ruthlessly impose the IMF dictates and would not hesitate to resort to police state measures to suppress any opposition.

Steeped in Sinhala chauvinism, the JVP has long abandoned its socialistic demagogic. Its anti-imperialist rhetoric has been replaced by private talks at the US embassy. We recalled the savagery of its fascistic murder of thousands of workers, youth and political opponents who refused to join its right-wing, patriotic campaign against the Indo-Lanka Accord in the late 1980s.

Upon taking office, president Anura Kumara Dissanayake discarded all of the JVP/NPP's promises. As finance minister, his budget this year strictly adhered to the IMF demands, including a fire-sale of state-owned enterprises, higher taxes on workers, and deep cuts to health and education. Jobs, wages and working conditions are all under attack. No wonder the IMF managing director Georgieva messaged Dissanayake, "Mr. President, Bravo! My Heart is With You!"

The working class will not accept the destruction of their social and democratic rights passively. Already struggles are emerging among School Development Officers, university non-academic workers and government health workers. The government has already responded by resorting to police violence. This class struggle is certain to escalate as Trump's tariffs threaten to collapse the Sri Lankan economy once again.

Events on this island are a harbinger of what faces workers throughout South Asia and globally. The ruling classes are turning sharply to the right to fascist and dictatorial forms of rule. The international working class must build its own independent organisations to fight for its interests.

During the 2022 popular uprising, we called for a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses based on representatives of independent action committees in workplaces, neighborhoods and rural areas throughout the island, uniting Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim workers. The bourgeoisie has its government and state apparatus. The working class and rural masses must have our own political centre to discuss, plan and implement our own strategy.

The SEP's struggle for such a Congress takes on a greater urgency today. It is the means of independently mobilizing the working class and rallying the rural poor and youth in a powerful socialist movement to overthrow capitalist rule and establish a government of workers and peasants. We fight for a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic as part of the Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally.

We urge workers, youth, rural toilers, and socialist-minded intellectuals in Sri Lanka and South Asia to join us in this crucial political struggle.

We conclude by paying tribute to the veteran Trotskyist leader, Comrade Nanda Wickremesinghe, who died aged 85 on April 20. Known throughout our international movement as Comrade Wicks, he was a founding member of the SEP's predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League, in 1968. His life encompassed all of the party's political struggles for Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution in South Asia that contain essential lessons for the revolutionary period ahead.

Thank you.



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