

Paris meeting advances socialist program to end war in Sri Lanka

By Antoine Lerougetel
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A meeting organised by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) was held in Paris on Sunday, March 15. The event was part of a worldwide campaign by the WSWs and ICFI to demand the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan army from the Tamil-populated east and north of the island. The meeting advanced a socialist and internationalist solution to the 25-year-long civil war that has claimed over 70,000 lives.

The campaign for the meeting reached wide layers of the large Tamil community in Paris, with supporters distributing thousands of leaflets and statements from the WSWs. The Tamil Internet radio station Tamilolli hosted a two-hour discussion with Myilvaganam Thevarajah, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka, and other WSWs supporters before the meeting.

The CCTF (Comité de Coordination Tamoul-France)—an organisation that supports the Tamil separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—attempted to intimidate WSWs supporters as they campaigned for the meeting. The CCTF seeks to suppress any criticism of the nationalist program of the LTTE, and insists it alone speaks for the Tamil people.

The campaign to stop the meeting continued outside the event itself. However, repeated efforts to disrupt the meeting failed, and 50 people, mostly from the French Tamil community, took part in the event. French university and high school students, teachers and workers, as well as several supporters who travelled from Germany and the UK, also participated.

The meeting was addressed by Myilvaganam Thevarajah, from the SEP in Sri Lanka, and Peter Schwarz, the secretary of the ICFI.

Thevarajah said the fight for the unification of the working class was at the centre of the struggle to end the war. He said the presence of French, German, English and Tamil workers at the meeting gave a glimpse of the possibility of unifying the working class against communalism and war and the capitalist system that produces it.

The Sri Lankan Trotskyist pointed out that the SEP was the only political party in the country that opposes the war and fights for the unity of Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program. “Based on this perspective,” he said, “we contested the provincial council elections in Nuwara Eliya and Puttalam on February 14 and, despite the threats and intimidation, we presented our program to hundreds of workers in public campaigns and meetings. We are also contesting the provincial council elections in Colombo on April 25 with 46 candidates.”

Thevarajah explained that the main opposition parties—the United National Party (UNP) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—fully support the war. “The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), Stalinist Communist Party, Ceylon Workers Congress, Upcountry Peoples

Front,” he said, are in the government coalition with President Mahinda Rajapakse’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and “are partners in the war.” The ex-radicals of the “Nama Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and United Socialist Party joined with the UNP, which supports the war,” he said.

Describing the brutal impact of the war, Thevarajah said nearly 50 Tamil civilians, including many children, were being killed every day by the military. Hospitals are being bombed and there is an acute shortage of doctors and medicine to treat the wounded.

He added, “While engaged in the onslaught against the Tamil minority the government has intensified political oppression in the South. Utilising the military gains the government has imposed the economic burden of the war on the working class and the poor... Death squads, travelling in unnumbered vehicles, kidnap and kill political opponents, journalists and businessmen.”

Thevarajah insisted that a military victory in the North would not only lead to a continuation of the suppression of the Tamil minority, but would “pave the way for intensified attacks on the working class throughout the country.”

Addressing the failed political outlook of the LTTE, he said the organization considered any orientation towards the independent political mobilization of the working class as a threat to its perspective of establishing a capitalist state to preserve the privileges of the Tamil elite. The LTTE did not distinguish between the reactionary political establishment in Colombo and ordinary Sinhala working people. Its violent attacks against Sinhala civilians, Thevarajah said, only served the interests of the government by sowing political confusion in the working class and providing a pretext for the military repression of the Tamil population.

He said an examination of history reveals that the war was the product of the outmoded nation-state system in South Asia and said its roots were to be found in the formal independence of India and Ceylon in 1947 and 1948 and the bloody partition with Pakistan. The Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) rejected the rotten deal between British imperialism and the national bourgeoisie and fought for the independent mobilization of the working class throughout the region.

He explained that the BLPI amalgamated with the LSSP in 1950. The LSSP at the beginning opposed Sinhala chauvinism but increasingly capitulated to nationalism and entered the coalition government of Mrs. Bandaranaike’s SLFP in 1964.

“The SEP in Sri Lanka has a long history of defending the rights of the Tamil people based on socialist principles. The forerunner of the SEP, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), was formed in 1968 in opposition to the betrayal of the LSSP. The RCL steadfastly

upheld Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution and advanced a revolutionary perspective for the Tamil question in opposition to the Tamil communalism."

Thevarajah concluded, "The fight against war and the struggles of the working class in Europe against unemployment and social cuts must not be separated. I call on everyone to consider your role in building a new revolutionary leadership of the international working class."

In his remarks, Peter Schwarz pointed out that the meeting was taking place amidst the deepest crisis of the world capitalist system since the 1930s, and that the entire world financial system is in a freefall without an end in sight. For the first time since World War II, he said, the entire global economy will shrink in 2009.

Schwarz insisted, "The present crisis is not a cyclical one; it is not a recession which—after one or two years—will give way to another economic upswing. Its centre is in the heart of world imperialism, the USA. It is the outcome of a protracted economic decline of American capitalism over the last forty years."

He said US imperialism was using its military superiority to compensate for this decline. He warned, "The American ruling class—and the same is true for its counterparts in Europe, Asia and everywhere else in the world—is not prepared to give up the fortunes and privileges it has amassed over the last decades on the basis of reckless speculation. It is resorting to even more rabid class war and militarism."

The present crisis, he said, has "revolutionary implications" and "will lead to fierce class struggles in the US, Europe, Asia and all over the world."

Schwarz said the crisis was leading to a shift in political relations around the world. "One focus of increasing US strategic interest is the Indian Ocean" he said, where the Obama administration is concerned about the rising naval power of India and China in an area of great strategic importance because of its trade routes and the adjacent energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. Two weeks ago, he said, Sri Lanka's *Sunday Times* had revealed plans for a US-led military mission into the island's northern war zone in the guise of evacuating civilians trapped between the army and the LTTE.

Two interrelated processes were unfolding, Schwarz explained. First, the intensification of the global contradictions of world capitalism, which threaten the impoverishment of the international working class, mass repression and a chain of ever more deadly military conflicts. In response to these conditions, there would be the development of the social and political militancy of the working class and new forms of revolutionary consciousness. "The decisive question," he said, was "which of these processes will gain the upper hand."

Schwarz reminded the audience of the concluding line of the *Communist Manifesto*, written more than 160 years ago, that called for, "Working Men of All Countries Unite!" and that the betrayal of this principle by the Second International had led to the imperialist slaughter of the First World War. "The revolutionaries at the time—Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and others—defended the perspective of proletarian internationalism. They called for the unity of the international working class and the transformation of the war into a civil war. The first successful proletarian revolution in history—the Russian revolution in October 1917 led by Lenin and Trotsky—was the outcome of this policy."

Trotsky and the Left Opposition fought the degeneration of the Soviet Union and Stalin's disastrous policy of socialism in one

country and founded the Fourth International. Schwarz told the meeting that after World War II the perspective of proletarian internationalism came under attack not only from outside, but also from inside the Fourth International. A revisionist tendency led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel capitulated to Stalinism, reformism and bourgeois nationalism.

"The ICFI, which was founded in 1953, emphatically rejected this revision of Marxism. It insisted that the stabilization of capitalism was a temporary phenomenon and had in no way overcome the basic contradictions of the capitalist system," Schwarz said.

"In 1964, the LSSP abandoned its principled opposition to communalism and Sinhala chauvinism and joined a bourgeois coalition government with the SLFP. This betrayal was covered up by the Pabloite United Secretariat. By joining a government with the SLFP and making Buddhism the state religion, the LSSP disarmed the working class politically and prepared the groundwork for a war that has lasted for three decades, destroying the lives of ten thousands of people and the infrastructure of the country.

"There is no national solution to this crisis," Schwarz insisted, "and there is no solution within the framework of capitalism. Either the bourgeoisie—as in 1914 and 1939—will throw humanity back into barbarism and war, or the working class will unite internationally, overthrow the capitalist system and build a socialist society. There is no other alternative."

Refuting the nationalist and retrograde outlook of the LTTE, Schwarz added, "Any idea that a country, an island or half an island could disengage itself from the world economy and find a solution within its own borders is both, absurd and reactionary. It would mean turning the clock back to the pre-capitalist age, to medieval times. It would involve a massive destruction of productive forces and human lives."

Far from being independent from imperialism, if the Tamil bourgeoisie were to realize its dream of a capitalist state, it would create nothing more than a cheap labour platform for multinational corporations, where the working class faced brutal exploitation and poverty.

Schwarz insisted that the fate of the working class in the advanced and backward capitalist countries—of American workers, European workers, Chinese workers and Sri Lankan workers—was inseparably intertwined.

He concluded by affirming, "The ICFI is the only organization on this planet with a spotless banner that has indefatigably defended proletarian internationalism under the most adverse and difficult conditions." He invited people to join the ICFI, saying, "It will provide the key to overcome and end decades of war and suffering in Sri Lanka. It will be the instrument for building of socialism on a world scale."

The remarks of the speakers were well received, and a collection at the end of the meeting raised hundreds of euros to support the Socialist Equality Party's election campaign in Sri Lanka.

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