

SEP in Sri Lanka holds powerful 50th anniversary meeting

By our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held a successful public meeting to mark its 50th anniversary at the Public Library auditorium in Colombo on June 22. About 150 party members, supporters, workers, youth and housewives attended the event.

The meeting was streamed live on Facebook and seen online by 500 viewers worldwide. It was the first in a series of meetings and lectures to be held at several Sri Lankan cities over the next two months.

SEP Political Committee member K. Ratnayake chaired the meeting and welcomed all in attendance. He explained that that founding congress of the SEP's predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), was held in Colombo on June 16–17, 1968. The party was established as the Sri Lankan section of International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The speaker paid tribute to the RCL's founding general secretary Keerthi Balasuriya, who led the party until his untimely death in December 1987, Wilfred Pereira (Spike), who played a leading role in the establishment of the party and during its initial development, and to all those who gave their lives in building the party.

Ratnayake said that the RCL was established to provide revolutionary leadership to the working class in Sri Lanka and in the South Asian region as part of the struggle for world socialist revolution.

He reviewed the central role played by the ICFI in providing essential political and theoretical guidance to all those who founded the RCL and reviewed two important milestones: the 1985–86 split with British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) and the transformation of ICFI sections from leagues into parties in 1995–96.

The ICFI's split with the WRP represented the decisive defeat of Pabloite opportunism by the genuine Trotskyists. The second milestone signaled the ICFI's decision to take direct responsibility for the revolutionary leadership of the international working class.

Greetings from David North, the chairman of the WSWs International Editorial Board, were then read to the meeting by SEP assistant national secretary Deepal Jayasekera and are published here.

SEP Political Committee member Vilani Peiris pointed out that the 50th anniversary of RCL/SEP was being held amid an acute crisis of world capitalism. "From its very inception," she said, "the RCL based its work on a firm internationalist basis."

Quoting from an SEP statement published by the WSWs on June 17, Peiris said that the initiative to establish the RCL was taken by a group of young people wanting to fight for Trotskyism. The resolutions passed at the congress included a resolution denouncing the Stalinist betrayal of 1968 French general strike and another supporting the struggle of Vietnamese workers and peasant masses against US imperialism.

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) convenor Kapila Fernando, also referred to the crucial role of the youth in the establishment of the RCL and in the struggle to build parties in the region fighting for the Trotskyist program of Permanent Revolution.

"The LSSP [Lanka Sama Samaja Party] and bourgeois nationalist and petty-bourgeois movements, such as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna [JVP], which politically dominated the working class, youth and oppressed masses when the RCL was founded, have all proven to be politically bankrupt.

"Within 50 years all these outfits have become appendages of imperialism," he explained.

SEP General Secretary and WSWs International Editorial Board member, Wijes Dias delivered the main report to the meeting. He began by quoting from a section of Trotsky's address to the third congress of the Third International in 1921: "The task of the working class—in Europe and throughout the world—consists in counterposing to the thoroughly thought out counter-revolutionary strategy of the bourgeoisie its own revolutionary strategy, likewise thought out to the end."

Trotsky's speech, Dias said, "is the guideline we adhered to when we founded the RCL in 1968 and it is the granite foundation from which the remaining founders of the party have never wavered, since then.

"As previous speakers have explained, the bitter political experience we encountered at that time was the 1964 betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which offered itself as a prop for the crumbling capitalist government of Sirima Bandaranaike.

“It is generally accepted,” he continued, “that the most grotesque result of this betrayal was the dissolution of the 21 demands movement of the working class that was building up and challenging the Sri Lankan government. But this was only the immediate effect of the betrayal.

“The greatest disaster was the loss of confidence among workers and the millions of oppressed masses in Sri Lanka and throughout South Asia, in the struggle of the Trotskyists, who alone could resolve the persistent social problems in the aftermath of the fake independence granted to the South Asian bourgeoisie in the post-WWII period.

“The Shakthi and later Virodaya formations, through which the group that founded the RCL had passed, were not the only centrist and petty-bourgeois political outfits that emerged as a result of the LSSP betrayal.

“About a dozen youth groups sprang up across the island and in other parts of the Indian sub-continent following the LSSP betrayal. Numerous petty-bourgeois radical groups came onto the scene, with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in Sri Lanka and the Naxalite movement in India the most prominent,” Dias said.

The speaker explained that because the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy and their local counterparts were thoroughly discredited many of these new youth groups turned to the Beijing Stalinists or Castro’s Cuba.

Referring the origins of the RCL, Dias explained: “Our orientation was completely different. Without acting impressionistically we wanted to find out what happened to the LSSP. We could not have done this, it must be emphasised, without the guidance of the ICFI.

The speaker explained role played by ICFI and the British Socialist Labor League (SLL). “After [SLL general secretary] Gerry Healy’s intervention during the LSSP congress of June 1964, we had the benefit of the visits by the Banda brothers, Mike and Tony, as representatives of ICFI.

“Under their guidance we turned to study the history of the Trotskyist movement, particularly the documents of the split of 1961–63, where the Socialist Workers Party of US broke from the ICFI to re-unite with the Pabloite revisionists who were the architects of the LSSP betrayal. The documents provided us with political gems that illuminated our way forward.

Dias referred to ICFI’s 1963 perspective document and its restatement of the fundamental postulates of the theory of Permanent Revolution.

This document, he said, “cut across the reactionary fairytales uttered by the LSSP about the progressive potentials of the bourgeois SLFP as well as the petty-bourgeois ‘socialist perspectives’ of the all the radical groups. It was these theoretical foundations that strengthened our fight to build the RCL in the working class in Sri Lanka and India.

“Keerthi Balasuriya, who led the RCL until his untimely death in 1987, stridently exposed the treacheries of LSSP and Stalinists who became partners of the bourgeois coalition

government of 1970 and also the bankrupt program of the JVP and the Naxalites in India.

“The stature of the RCL increased rapidly during the party’s first decade and in the midst of the wave of revolutionary struggles of the working class in the advanced countries and the masses in the semi-colonial countries in 1968–75.”

Dias told the meeting it was not possible to review the entire 50-year history of the RCL/SEP but briefly explained the development of the political work of the ICFI after the break from the renegades of the British Workers Revolutionary Party, in 1985–86.

He referred to November 1987 ICFI statement on Sri Lanka and the subsequent analysis of the Indian government’s military intervention in Sri Lanka to crush the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] and to stabilise the Colombo government. The perspective developed at that time by the ICFI, with the participation of comrade Keerthi, was a clear program for a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam through a unified struggle of the working class of the Indian sub-continent.

The transformation of the RCL into SEP in 1996 and establishment of the WSWs in 1998, had seen the political, theoretical and practical work of every section of the ICFI, including SEP in Sri Lanka, reached a new high, Dias said.

“These are conscious preparations of the world party to bring a homogeneous revolutionary socialist strategy to the working class. This intersects with the protracted breakdown of the world economic order and the new wave of class struggles that is developing around the globe.”

The speaker concluded by referring to the internationally coordinated campaigns of the ICFI and WSWs against Internet censorship and to free WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange. “These are powerful pledges for the future victories of the Trotskyist movement as the political head of the world working class,” Dias said.

The meeting ended by unanimously passing a resolution supporting the ICFI’s campaign against Trump administration’s attacks on immigrants.

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