

Jaffna (Sri Lanka) meeting celebrates 80th anniversary of the Fourth International

By R. Shreeharan
6 December 2018

Workers, teachers, fishermen, students, youth and housewives from all over Jaffna district attended last Friday's public meeting marking the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International. Organised by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the event was held at the Jaffna Public Library canteen hall.

Jaffna, the largest city in Sri Lanka's north, and its surrounding districts remain devastated by Colombo's almost three-decade communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In the days before the meeting, SEP and IYSSE members distributed thousands of leaflets across the city and at workplaces, as well as Jaffna university and the teachers' training college.

SEP Central Committee member P. Thirugnanasampanthar chaired the meeting and SEP General Secretary Wije Dias delivered the main lecture, entitled "*The Lessons of History and the Fight for Socialism Today*." David North, chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board, delivered speeches under the same title at meetings in Colombo and Kandy during October.

Thinakkural, a Tamil daily newspaper, announced the meeting a day before the event and requested an interview with Wije Dias. MTV's "News First" broadcast a considerable portion of Thirugnanasampanthar's opening address to the meeting.

Thirugnanasampanthar began with an overview of international political events and the growing danger of global military conflict and stressed the contemporary relevance of the historic struggle of the Fourth International. "Without the revolutionary intervention of the working class it is impossible to stop the

devastation that would be created by a third world war," he said.

Working people all over the world were entering into struggle against government and employer attacks on their living standards, Thirugnanasampanthar said. He warned that they "cannot defend their democratic and social rights by pressuring crisis-ridden capitalism and its various governments. The working class must establish its own power and this requires a socialist perspective and leadership based on an international socialist program."

Thirugnanasampanthar referred to the bitter conflict raging within the Sri Lankan elite following President Maithripala Sirisena's dismissal of Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister and his replacement by Mahinda Rajapakse. He explained that the political infighting was an expression of decay of the bourgeois parliamentary system established in Sri Lanka in 1948.

The speaker commented on the role of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). The TNA, he said, "continuously works as an agent of US imperialism." Its leader, R. Sambandan, had told foreign diplomats that law-and-order needs to be implemented soon in Sri Lanka or else "anti-social elements may engage in violence with far reaching results." Sambandan's statement was "an appeal to the major powers to intervene against the working people."

Wije Dias told the meeting the crisis of bourgeois rule was driven by global economic and political processes. No national economic unit, he said, had been able to escape the repercussions of the global financial crisis that began in 2008. "This is why, despite the end of the anti-Tamil war in Sri Lanka and the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2009, no political stability has been achieved in the island," Dias said.

Lengthy columns in the bourgeois press and

television commentaries about the present political crisis, the speaker continued, were devoid of any reference to the global crisis of world capitalism. Likewise, the interventions of the so-called left parties and the unions were designed to politically disarm working people and youth.

Dias said the capitalist classes in every country were adopting authoritarian and dictatorial forms of rule in preparation for war. Confronted by the growing resistance of working people and youth to the austerity measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund, the Sri Lankan ruling elites were moving to discard the parliamentary constitution and establish a police-military dictatorship.

“Without a historical approach to these questions, the working class cannot properly understand, let alone prepare to fight against, these attacks, Dias said.

The speaker explained that Leon Trotsky’s decision to found the Fourth International was a result of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy’s policies, which allowed Hitler to come to power in Germany in 1933, and the lack of any condemnation of this devastating betrayal within the Third International.

Trotsky’s analysis of all the strategic lessons of the working class in the imperialist epoch guided the fight for the Fourth International over the next five years to gather and train a revolutionary cadre to establish the new international in 1938.

Turning again to Sri Lanka’s political crisis, Dias said: “The TNA, JVP [Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna] and the pseudo-left parties, such as Nava Sama Samaja Party and the Frontline Socialist Party, and the Maoist parties, claim it is a question of choosing the lesser evil of the two fighting bourgeois factions.

“Some back Rajapakse’s faction and others Wickremesinghe’s. The reactionary contract they have undertaken is to disorient and deflect the working people and youth from the independent political preparations they urgently need to confront and defeat the counter-revolutionary schemes of the ruling elite as a whole.

“Bourgeois politicians like TNA leader R. Sambandan and his new rival, Northern Province Chief Minister C. Vigneswaran, are tied to Colombo capitalist rule and imperialism by thousands of threads. They do not represent the aspirations of the working people and are hostile to any perspective for the unity

of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim working class and rural poor.”

Dias concluded by appealing to all those in the meeting to join the SEP and take forward the struggle to build the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Several of those in attendance spoke with WSWS reporters about the meeting.

Theeban, a history teacher, decided to come to the event after seeing a poster. “The current political situation in Sri Lanka is full of confusion and dangers,” he said. “People do not believe any of the political parties in Sri Lanka but the meeting made clear how the crisis erupted and what is the solution...”

“As the lecturer said, the working class should take power by rejecting all these political parties. This is the need today and these ideas should be taken among broad masses.”

Milistan Raj, an advanced level student, commented: “The ‘good governance’ administration established in 2015 did nothing for the people but, in fact, led to higher prices and other difficulties. Unable to solve any political problem, President Sirisena is now acting in an autocratic manner. At the same time, the Tamil parties in the North regard the people as a vote bank.

“I understood many issues from this meeting. In particular today I learnt about socialism. I now understand that the political crisis in Sri Lanka is not just an isolated issue but part of the world economic crisis and it can be solved only by fighting for socialism. This is what we need today.”

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