

Aftermath of terrorist attack: Sri Lankan SEP public meeting warns about threat of dictatorship

By our reporters
27 May 2019

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a successful meeting in Colombo last week to discuss the critical political situation in the aftermath of terrorist bombings on April 21. The horrific attack resulted in the death of over 250 innocent people and injuries to another 500.

Prior to the meeting SEP and IYSSE members campaigned at the railway quarters in Ratmalana, among Colombo harbour workers, in front of the busy Colombo railway station and among university students. About 150 party members, supporters, youth and housewives attended.

The meeting entitled “Defeat the government’s police-military dictatorial plans” was chaired by SEP assistant national secretary Deepal Jayasekera. He explained that while political leaders were blaming each other for the bombings, all were united in imposing repressive emergency laws and deploying the military throughout the country.

“No-one within the ruling elite, the media or pseudo-left groups even ask the one important question, let alone answer it: Why was this attack allowed to take place even though the defence establishment had the advance warning that it was to take place?”

The SEP is the only party that provides an answer. The ruling elites are exploiting the disaster to justify repressive measures aimed at suppressing the emerging workers’ struggles, he said. “We alone fight to mobilise workers and the poor against these measures.”

By attending the All Party Conference called by President Sirisena on April 25, Jayasekera explained, all the establishment parties lent their full support to the repressive laws. Despite their tactical differences, all of them are united in fearing the growing class struggles and

are determined to suppress them.

IYSSE leader Pradeep Ramanayake said that youth and students have become a target of police-state measures. After a long period of closure, the universities have been now re-opened after military searches.

At the Sri Jayawardenapura University, a student was arrested because of a Facebook post. The president and secretary of the Jaffna university arts faculty student union were also taken into custody after the military found a picture of the slain leader of Liberation of Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), V. Prabhakaran, in the union office.

“In the recent period, students have protested against privatisation and the lack of facilities. The aim of military and police operations in universities is to intimidate students as part of the crackdown on the working class.

“Official student leadership run by the Inter University Students Federation (IUSF) has appealed to the government to assure security at the universities. Now the IUSF is campaigning against so-called Islamic extremism. That is how they support the government’s repressive actions,” Ramanayake said.

SEP Political Committee member Pani Wijesiriwardena delivered the main speech. He said that the political situation in Sri Lanka had reached a critical stage. “To understand why the Sri Lankan ruling elites are turning towards a dictatorship we must place the development here in the world situation,” Wijesiriwardena explained.

“In the United States, strikes by teachers have erupted in many states. Teachers’ struggles have also taken place in Poland and in Tamil Nadu in India. In France, the “yellow vest” movement’s struggle has continued for months now. The Indian government’s nervousness about the emerging struggles was shown by the jailing of 13 Maruti Suzuki workers for life in the Haryana industrial

belt.”

Wijesiriwardena explained that the response of ruling classes in every country to these developing class struggles was a turn to the right. They are seeking to establish dictatorial forms of rule and encouraging fascist movements.

“The US imperialism is at an advanced state in its war preparations. While attempting to encircle China militarily and confronting it economically, the US now threatens Iran and to escalate war in Syria.”

In Sri Lanka, President Sirisena used the April 21 terrorist attack to impose far reaching repressive measures—a state of emergency and the deployment of troops throughout the country on a scale not seen since the end of the bloody civil war against the LTTE.

“Why?” he asked. “It is because the government and every faction of the ruling class is nervous about the struggles erupting here and internationally.” He cited the nine-day strike by plantation workers in December and the one-day strike by 200,000 teachers in March.

In relation to the terrorist attacks on April 21, neither the government nor the military has explained why prior warnings by a foreign intelligence agency were ignored. “Everything indicates that the government turned a blind eye so as to exploit the situation to impose far-reaching, anti-democratic measures to suppress the class struggle,” the speaker said.

Wijesiriwardena explained that enormous powers have been granted to the military. So pleased was Army Commander Mahesh Senanayake that he declared: “We demanded a bicycle. But we have received a car.”

On the 10th anniversary of the LTTE’s defeat, President Sirisena said that the terrorism was an international issue and Sri Lanka should also join with the world to end terrorism. In other words, Sri Lanka should line up with the major powers, particularly the US.

“When the ISIS declared responsibility for the attacks on April 21, it claimed to have aimed at the alliance headed by the US,” the speaker said. “It is a significant fact that when the attack took place the US military was engaged in an extensive exercise with the Sri Lankan navy that began on April 19 in Hambantota.”

He said the government was expanding relations with the US. Foreign minister Tilak Marapana visited the US recently and held extensive discussions with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisor John Bolton and Undersecretary of State David Hale. Marapana and Hale issued a joint statement calling for stronger military ties between Sri Lanka and the US.

The speaker warned against the anti-Muslim campaign being whipped up by the political establishment. He said that the Sri Lankan ruling class has always promoted communalist reaction to divide the working class in the midst of rising class struggles.

Workers need to oppose communal provocations and steps towards police state rule, and rally the peasantry and other oppressed layers to fight for a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement socialist policies.

“Workers, oppressed layers and youth are invited to read the WSWS and join and build the SEP as the necessary leadership to fight for this program,” Wijesiriwardena concluded.

WSWS reporters spoke to several meeting attendees.

Sisira, a university student, said: “I condemn the anti-Muslim campaign by government, opposition parties and media saying that Muslim people are responsible for April 21 attacks.

“I also condemn the JVP’s propaganda that extremism is generated within Muslim society. The Frontline Socialist Party and IUSF covers up the fact that roots of extremism lie within capitalism. The IUSF directly supports deployment of security forces within universities.”

Kavishwara, a young worker from Gampaha, said: “It is vital that the working class understands these developments and unites under an international socialist program to fight the war plans of American imperialism. This is the first time I have attended an SEP meeting. I want to study the SEP program and read the WSWS deeply.”

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