

Sri Lankan SEP holds online meeting on global protests against police murders

By Wije Dias
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held an online meeting on June 14 about the murder of George Floyd in the US, the eruption of international protests against it and the attempts by the ruling classes in every country to establish autocratic methods of rule. Below we publish the main speech delivered by SEP General Secretary Wije Dias, which was simultaneously translated into Tamil.

Today we discuss the political implications of the growing wave of worldwide struggles against the murder of 46-year-old African-American George Floyd in the US and the ruling class preparations for dictatorships internationally. Our experiences in Sri Lanka closely resonate with these world developments.

It was less than a week ago that the government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse, which already has taken giant strides towards establishing a military-police regime, unleashed a brutal police attack against a protest picket held by the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) against the killing of Floyd.

The FSP protest was due to be held in front of the American embassy in Colombo. Police, however, had obtained a court order banning the event. When protestors came to the Colombo municipal junction, they were violently attacked by the police. This has deep-going political implications. That is why the SEP did not hesitate in denouncing the police vehemently, despite the unbridgeable political differences we have with that party.

However, at a press conference, Pubudu Jayagoda, the FSP propaganda secretary, referred to the police attack as a “joke,” saying it was “one of all the jokes played by the Rajapakse regime during the past seven months.” Far from denouncing the government, Jayagoda simply challenged the cabinet spokesman Bandula Gunawardena to a debate on this issue. In the eyes of working people and youth, such cowardice and shortsightedness can attract only contempt.

There is an ongoing wave of global militant protests and demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of people against the police killing of Floyd. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), not only supports this mounting protest movement of workers and youth, it has provided the only viable political perspective to achieve the aspirations of those who have come forward in defense of democratic rights.

For days after Floyd’s killing, the police responsible remained free. The authorities only took action against the killers after the protests erupted. Immediately, black racialists used the situation to claim this as a discriminatory act against blacks, because the

police involved were white. They, no doubt, strengthened the hand of the oppressor by helping to demoralise and disorient those people who joined the demonstrations which cut across racial and color differences.

The criminal attempts of the US establishment to let Floyd’s killers go scot free should not surprise anyone. In Sri Lanka, all factions of the ruling class, and their pseudo-left supporters, have given all the killers in the armed forces complete immunity for the slaughter not of dozens but thousands of innocent Tamils during the 30-year war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Donald Trump responded by ordering the National Guard to suppress protesters with tear gas, batons and live bullets, killing dozens and injuring hundreds. Not only in Sri Lanka but workers and youth all over the world have experienced how the repressive arm of capitalist state does not consider skin colour, race or language when unleashing its murderous repression.

In a statement issued on June 8, the SEP in US stated: “One of the most striking features of this development is its ‘leaderless’ character. Whichever ruling party is currently dominant in any given country, the official attitude toward the growth of social opposition among workers and youth is fundamentally hostile.”

This “leaderless” character of the protests underscores the rightward move of the so-called democrats, trade unions and the “lefts” under the conditions in which the ruling classes are turning to military-fascist dictatorships. The abdication of these fake leaderships is because they realise that what is at stake in the emerging mass struggles is the capitalist system itself.

People have come into the streets against Floyd’s killing to express their opposition more broadly to attacks on their living conditions, the gutting of jobs and the annihilation of social rights through austerity measures. This wave of struggles challenges the entire capitalist structure based on private property and its system of nation states.

Under conditions of a protracted breakdown of global capitalism, a decline in economic growth is predicted for all major economies. The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not likely to go away for a decade. The estimated economic contraction in Britain will be 14 percent this year, for Spain 11.6 percent, for France 10.3 percent and for Italy and Germany 9.2 and 6.1 percent respectively.

Countries in South Asia, as well as others in the so-called Third World, will face severe economic declines not seen since the

colonial rule of the 1930s. The rhetoric of Rajapakse in Sri Lanka and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India about autarkic economic development and self-sufficiency is a hollow rant aimed at hoodwinking the masses. The moves towards dictatorship arise out of this objective crisis of the profit system in every country.

In his *The Civil War in France*, Karl Marx explained the class character of the capitalist state: “[T]here developed in nineteenth century ‘the centralised state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature.’ With the development of class antagonisms between capital and labor, ‘state power assumed more and more the character of a police force for the suppression of the working class, a machine of class rule’” [Cited from Lenin’s *The State and Revolution*].

The ruling classes have only widened social polarisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. While workers are driven back to work places and will die due to the lack of necessary protection, Trump handed over \$US3 trillion to big businesses and banks to cover their “losses.” The richest one percent of the population in the US is even richer as millions of workers have lost their jobs due to the same coronavirus lockdown.

In Sri Lanka, tens of thousands of workers have lost their jobs. At many places, the pandemic has been used to force the workers to work, with the risk to their health and lives, for a meager monthly wage of 14,500 rupees [\$US78]. No trade union has uttered a word of protest against these social crimes.

Addressing the millions around the world protesting against police killings, the SEP in its June 8 statement emphasised: “The enemy must be properly identified. It is not just a matter of rogue police forces or racist cops. The source of the attack on democratic rights is the financial oligarchy and the social and economic system, capitalism, upon which its wealth and power are based.”

Identifying the enemy closes the door on the futile search for “lesser-evils” within the political establishment, as done by all varieties of reformists and pseudo-lefts. When workers make this identification, they will also see that the capitalist class is an internationally-organised class.

The issue posed by such an understanding is to look for the social force that is capable of the fight against this class. Only genuine Marxism provides the answer. In the *Communist Manifesto*, drafted by Marx and Engels in 1847, they explained that out of all the social classes that come into struggle against capitalism the working class is the only consistently revolutionary class.

Moreover, Lenin explained: “The strength of the proletariat in any capitalist economy is far greater than the proportion it represents in the total population. That is because the proletariat economically dominates the centre and nerve of the entire economic system of capitalism, and also because the proletariat expresses economically and politically the real interests of the overwhelming majority of the working people under capitalism.”

The ICFI has insisted, in line with its analysis on the globalisation of world capitalist economy, that the class struggle of the workers not only in content but also in form becomes international in this period. Against the ruling classes internationally, all the oppressed social forces should be mobilised under the leadership of the working class.

The acuteness of the crisis of capitalist rule in Sri Lanka is reflected in the political splits in all four major capitalist parties—the United National Party, Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Tamil National Alliance and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. New political formations are thrown up under various banners of “Balawegayas” or forces. The task of all these “forces” is to prevent the working class from taking the political leadership in rallying all sections of the masses and the oppressed against the Rajapakse regime.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Lenin was engaged in an unrelenting struggle for the political independence of the working class against the Narodniks (Populists) in Russia who insisted petty-bourgeois peasant communes were the basis for socialism. Trotsky in his Theory of Permanent Revolution went further and insisted on the hegemonic role of the working class in the revolution and the dictatorship of the working class as the vehicle of international socialism.

Based on these invaluable strategic lessons, the SEP, the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI, fights for the establishment of a workers’ and peasants’ government in the form of a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the federation of socialist republics of South Asia and internationally.

We now face a situation where the Rajapakse government is accelerating the militarisation of its rule. This raises the necessity to intensify our struggle to educate and mobilise the working people, students and youth, in Sri Lanka and South Asia, on the basis of our international socialist perspective.

In the SEP’s election statement we have elaborated these issues. It will be used as a basis for a wide range of political discussions in the coming month as part of our general election campaign.

The SEP has decided to publish four newsletters aimed at workers in the education, health, apparel and immigrant sectors. The campaign for subscribers will be accompanied by steps to build Action Committees of working people and youth to fight to defend basic democratic and social rights. We call on all our listeners to join the SEP and participate in this struggle.

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